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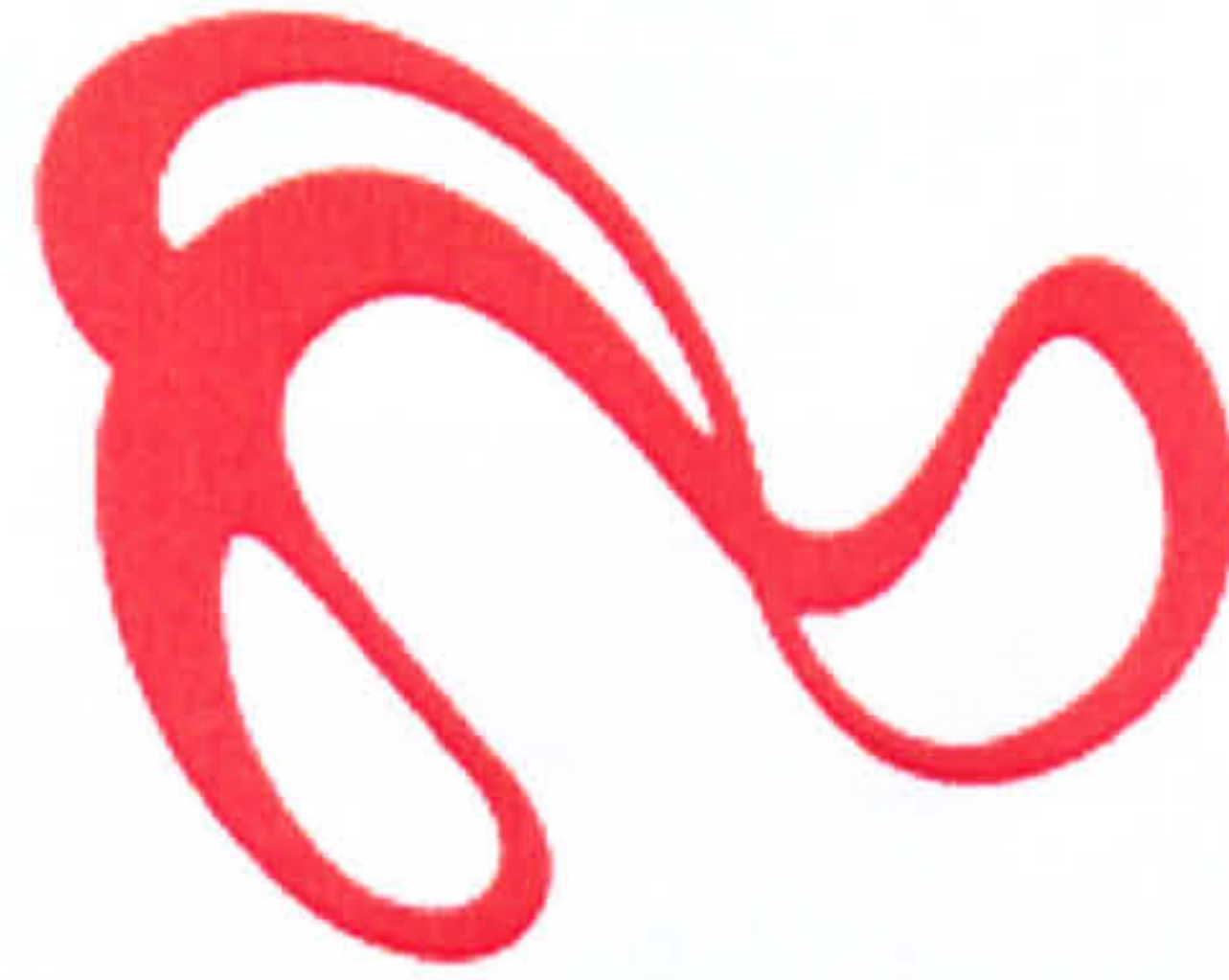
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**Middlesex
University**

**Partnerships between higher and further education:
their contribution to government objectives for
widening participation in higher education**

**A project report submitted by
Catherine Jennifer Anderson**

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for a

**Doctorate in Professional Studies
(Higher Education Policy)**

June 2004

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FOREWORD

Approval to undertake the project that is the subject of this report was granted by Middlesex University in June 2002. At the time the researcher was employed by the University as Director of the Higher Education and Training Partnership, a partnership between the University and four further education colleges in north London and Essex. The fieldwork that provides the evidence for the report was largely conducted between July 2002 and April 2003.

The researcher took up a new post as Director of Research with the Learning and Skills Development Agency at the end of April 2003. During the period May to June 2004, continued support and access to resources were provided by Middlesex University to facilitate completion of the research.

Two further developments are worthy of note in relation to the timing of the project. First, the Higher Education and Training Partnership underwent a complete review during the course of the fieldwork. The context, conduct and outcomes of the review are captured in Chapter 4, the case study of the Higher Education and Training Partnership. Secondly, the Higher Education Funding Council for England commissioned a review of indirect funding agreements between higher education institutions and further education colleges. The review took place between January and June 2003. The researcher was asked to chair the advisory group for the review and was privy to information that was not in the public domain but that was of direct relevance to the conduct of the research. Confidential information obtained while carrying out the role of chair of the advisory group was excluded from this report.

Finally, it should be noted that the study was conducted as the final element of a work-based learning programme for the award of Doctorate in Professional Studies (Higher Education Policy). The researcher undertook the project as a reflective practitioner. The project and its outcomes were intended to have a positive impact on the organisation that was the site of the work-based learning and the broader community in which it was located, as well as on the researcher's own learning.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Widening participation in higher education: the contribution of partnerships between higher and further education

Widening participation in higher education has been a stated priority of the Government since it came to power in 1997. In its 2001 election manifesto, the Government set a target that, by 2010, 50% of people aged between 18-30 will have had the opportunity to experience higher education. The percentage of this age group currently engaged in higher education is calculated at 43%. Government education policy in the last six to seven years has explicitly encouraged collaboration between institutions in the higher and further education sectors as a means of widening participation in higher education. Partnerships are seen as holding the key to delivering the Government's 50% target.

This research explored the contribution that such partnerships make to Government objectives for widening participation in higher education. Four case studies of partnership were examined: the Higher Education and Training Partnership, based at Middlesex University; the Staffordshire University Regional Federation, the Anglia Polytechnic University Regional University Partnership and the Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education, involving the University of Luton. The case studies represented two examples each of the two main models of indirect funding between higher and further education, the funding consortium and the franchise partnership.

The case studies were informed by a review of the literature. Quantitative and qualitative evidence was gathered for the case studies through a study of the data and documentation provided by the four case study partnerships and by means of a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of carefully selected respondents.

The analysis of the qualitative evidence and the limited quantitative evidence that it was possible to obtain from the case studies generated a set of findings from which conclusions were drawn. The analysis, findings and conclusions represent a valuable contribution to the knowledge about partnerships and their behaviour, a hitherto under-researched area.

The main conclusion was that it is difficult to assess the contribution of partnerships between higher and further education to Government objectives for widening participation because of the lack of robust, comparable student number data. This conclusion addresses the main research question and is the major outcome of the study. On the basis of the data it was possible to obtain from the four partnerships that constituted the case studies, there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate conclusively the value of partnerships. None of the partnerships measured the extent to which the range of higher education provision delivered by partner colleges had been extended. Case study respondents expressed a strong belief in the value of what they were doing but the benefits had not been translated into performance indicators that were capable of being measured and monitored. Only one of the four partnerships had analysed fully its contribution to widening participation in quantitative terms.

Based on the quantitative data it was possible to collect from the case study partnerships, there appeared to be a growth trend in the numbers of higher education students in partner colleges. But it is impossible to identify how much of the growth was as a result of the partnerships and their efforts to widen participation.

Partnerships between higher and further education offer a number of actual or potential benefits to their members. The qualitative analysis of the case studies highlighted the respondents' perceptions of the purposes of partnership which were frequently expressed in terms of the benefits of partnership to their respective institutions. The purposes and benefits went beyond what was captured in partnership agreements.

Both the funding consortium and the franchise partnership models offer a basis for effective partnership. The funding consortium model may be more difficult to manage than the franchise partnership model because the principle of equality in relation to the arrangements for data collection and quality assurance can create additional operational challenge. However, the research identified that partnerships have to a large extent been allowed by HEFCE to develop in their own way, with an absence of prescriptive frameworks or criteria for success, making it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness.

There are a number of themes that may impact on the effectiveness of partnerships. These formed the basis of the thematic framework against which the case studies were analysed. The findings confirmed the validity of the themes. The findings were clustered under two further themes, barriers to effective partnership operation and critical success factors in effective partnerships.

There are a number of barriers to effective partnership operation. Seven barriers were identified as a result of the analysis of the case studies. Four of these related to factors outside the partnerships' control, including the different arrangements in the two sectors for data collection, quality assurance, and the terms and conditions of service for academic staff.

There appear to be a number of critical success factors in effective partnerships. The analysis revealed six factors that appeared from the research to be critically important to the success of partnerships between higher and further education.

Partnerships demonstrate a range of good practice in their strategies to widen participation that could usefully be shared more widely. In the course of the research, eight examples of good practice were identified as potentially having applicability for other partnerships.

The conclusions prompted ideas for further research or development in the area of partnerships between higher and further education:

- A more sophisticated quantitative analysis, based on more robust and comprehensive data, of the growth delivered by colleges in higher/further education partnerships, including how much of the increase in higher education student numbers can be ascribed to other wider societal factors
- Evaluation of the respective benefits and costs to institutions of their involvement in collaborative activities
- Development of appropriate performance indicators for partnerships
- Evaluation of the barriers that have a real impact on partnerships' ability to achieve their objectives
- Evaluation of the critical success factors identified through the research
- Evaluation of the selected examples of good practice in strategies to widen participation
- Development of mechanisms for sharing good practice.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Widening participation in higher education has been a stated priority of the Government since it came to power in 1997. In its 2001 election manifesto, the Government set a target that, by 2010, 50% of people aged between 18-30 will have had the opportunity to experience higher education. The percentage of this age group currently engaged in higher education is calculated at 43%. Government education policy in the last six to seven years has explicitly encouraged collaboration between higher and further education as a means of widening participation in higher education. Partnerships between institutions in the two sectors are seen as holding the key to delivering the Government's 50% target.

This research explored the contribution that such partnerships make to Government objectives for widening participation in higher education. A review of the literature provided the background and context for the policy thrust. Four case studies of partnership were examined, representing two examples each of the two main models of indirect funding between higher and further education, the funding consortium and the franchise partnership:

- Case study 1: the Higher Education and Training Partnership, a funding consortium of Middlesex University and four further education colleges;
- Case study 2: the Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF), a funding consortium of Staffordshire University and 11 further education colleges in Staffordshire and Shropshire.
- Case study 3: the Anglia Polytechnic Regional University Partnership, made up of individual partnerships between Anglia Polytechnic University and 23 colleges, primarily in the Eastern region of England.
- Case study 4: the Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education, made up of individual partnerships between the University of Luton and four colleges in Bedfordshire.

The report comprises nine chapters, including this Introduction:

Chapter 2 sets out the rationale and methodology for the project.

Chapter 3 locates the project in a policy and historical context by means of a review of the literature.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 are devoted to the four case studies referred to above.

Chapter 8 provides three separate analyses of the case studies that are used to derive findings from the research.

Chapter 9 draws six conclusions from the findings. The chapter includes recommendations for further research. It reflects on the contribution of the study in general terms and, in particular, its impact on HETP and Middlesex University.

CHAPTER 2 PROJECT RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The reason for undertaking this research was to inform the next stage of development of the Higher Education and Training Partnership (HETP). The project was conducted by the researcher, in the role of Director of HETP, as the final element of a work-based learning programme leading to the award of Doctorate in Professional Studies. The trigger for the research was the recognition that HETP had reached a plateau stage of development and was in need of review to determine how best to move forward. The researcher's line manager, the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Middlesex University, shared that assessment. It was agreed that undertaking the review within the framework of the Doctorate in Professional Studies programme would provide a structure for the review and give it a rigour that would lend greater credibility to the findings. The experience of conducting the research, together with the previous learning acquired through the earlier stages of the Doctorate programme, was intended to enable the researcher to have a significant positive impact on HETP and contribute to the knowledge about partnerships between higher and further education.

Formalised partnerships between providers in the higher and further education sectors are still relatively new. The funding consortium model had only been in place for a year when the research started. Policy initiatives aimed at widening participation encouraged collaboration between higher and further education providers without being prescriptive about the form that collaboration should take. Yet there was a growing expectation on the part of policy makers and funders that institutions should work together in partnership towards the goal of widening participation. The research was intended to provide a better understanding of the processes involved in such partnerships and to develop knowledge about why they had been formed, how they worked and how much they had achieved.

Project title, aims and objectives

The title of the project is *Partnerships between higher and further education: their contribution to Government objectives for widening participation in higher education*.

The aims of the project were to:

- enable the HETP to become a more effective organisation and achieve its mission by learning from the good practice demonstrated by three comparator partnerships; and
- inform policy development and implementation in the area of partnerships between higher and further education.

The objectives of the project were to:

- locate partnerships between higher and further education in the context of recent and current Government objectives for education, particularly higher education;
- undertake an in-depth case study of HETP;
- compare and contrast HETP with three other models of partnership between higher and further education in England, using a case study approach;
- identify good practice in the development and management of higher/further education partnerships;
- identify barriers to effective partnership operation; and
- add to the knowledge about partnerships between higher and further education for the benefit of other institutions or organisations with an interest in these matters.

Definition of terms

The project title includes four concepts – partnership, higher education, further education and widening participation – that can have multiple meanings and associations. The following paragraphs may be helpful in providing some clarification of the meanings of these and other terms as they are used in the report. The interpretations are the researcher's, informed by the literature, unless specifically referenced.

Partnership

The term *partnership* enjoys a richness of meaning in an educational context. There are many different types of partnership between higher and further education. Those that are the subject of the research are the two main types of indirect funding partnership between universities and further education colleges. These are the *franchise partnership* and the *funding consortium*. The features of each model are set out below under the section that deals with case study selection.

Higher education

Higher education in England is currently delivered by the 132 universities and other higher education institutions that form the higher education sector. Many further education colleges also deliver higher education. Of those, 171 are directly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Other colleges delivering higher education are in indirect funding arrangements with universities. Some colleges are in receipt of both direct and indirect funding for the higher education work they do.

Higher education falls into two categories that have their origins in the 1988 Education Reform Act. The first category is prescribed higher education and is funded by HEFCE. It includes higher national certificates and diplomas, foundation degrees, ordinary and honours degrees and post-graduate qualifications. The second category is non-prescribed higher education and is funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It comprises largely part-time higher level vocational or professional qualifications, including those at NVQ Level 4 and 5. Further education colleges are responsible for delivering the majority of non-prescribed higher education. In his 1997 study of HE patterns of participation in England, Parry identified that over two-thirds of higher education students in further education colleges were following non-prescribed courses, with almost 90% of them studying part-time. This analysis predated the re-categorisation and transfer of funding responsibility for higher national certificates from the former funding body for further education to HEFCE.

Prescribed higher education is described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and non-prescribed higher education is included within Levels 4 and 5 of the National Qualifications Framework. The Frameworks are set out in Appendix 1. The lack of alignment between the qualifications frameworks for higher and further education has been identified by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, among

others, as a potential impediment to the identification of clear progression pathways and, therefore, as a priority to be addressed.

The main product offered by universities and other higher education institutions is the three-year honours degree. The majority of further education colleges' higher education provision is made up of sub-degree provision, in the form of higher national certificates, higher national diplomas and foundation degrees. Some colleges offer modules or years of honours degrees while a smaller number offer entire honours degrees. Many offer higher level vocational or professional qualifications that fall into the non-prescribed higher education category and are funded by the LSC.

Further education

Further education comprises those courses of education or training that are eligible for funding by the LSC under the terms of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. The majority of those courses lead to recognised qualifications that are categorised in the National Qualifications Framework (see Appendix 1).

Further education in England is delivered by over 400 colleges and a large number of work-based learning and adult and community learning providers. The college sector comprises general further education, tertiary and sixth form colleges, specialist colleges for art and design and specialist colleges for the land-based industries. Collectively, the organisations responsible for delivering further education make up what is called the learning and skills sector in which the provision is largely funded by the LSC. Some higher education institutions also deliver further education programmes and receive funding from the LSC accordingly.

As may be seen from the above descriptions, it is impossible to describe a typical higher or further education institution. The boundaries between the two are becoming increasingly blurred and there are examples of hybrid or "mixed-economy" institutions in both the higher and the further education sectors.

Differences in funding, quality assurance and data requirements between higher and further education

The two sectors are characterised by different systems for funding, quality assurance and the collection and analysis of student number data. The legislative and administrative frameworks for further and higher education are set out in Appendix 2.

Widening or increasing participation

Widening participation is about creating the conditions where different categories of people are enabled or encouraged to engage in higher education. *Increasing participation*, on the other hand, means more people but not necessarily different categories of people being engaged in higher education. Widening participation is about making higher education accessible to those people who have traditionally not benefited from it. Their reasons for not participating may be rooted in a variety of factors including those relating to finances or fear of debt, family or peer expectations, cultural traditions, employment circumstances, ignorance of progression routes, lack of confidence or a record of academic underachievement at an earlier stage in their lives. Stuart (2002) describes widening participation in the following terms:

. . . widening participation has a specific focus on redressing the class-based elitism that has dominated our education institutions since their inception. . . . Hence, widening participation is not just about increasing the numbers of people learning but also about greater diversity of learners. (Stuart 2002)

For some commentators, the difference between widening and increasing participation is about the underlying motivation for each approach. In other words, is it about social transformation (widening participation) or merely expansion of the higher education system (increasing participation)? Scott argues that increasing participation will in any case lead to widening participation:

... ministers are wrong to see widening and increasing participation as potentially in conflict if their goal is, as it should be, the wider democratisation of higher education. History clearly demonstrates that the best and surest way to widen participation is to expand the system. (Scott 2003)

A number of related terms are used in discussions of widening participation. These include: access; social inclusion or social cohesion; and economic competitiveness. These may be found in the glossary.

The research questions

The principal research goal of the study was to identify the contribution of partnerships between higher and further education to Government objectives for widening participation in higher education. There were six sub-questions in addition to the main question, making a total of seven research questions:

1. *What is the contribution of partnerships between higher and further education to Government objectives for widening participation in higher education?*
2. *How is the contribution measured?*
3. *To what extent is it possible to identify common themes in partnerships between higher and further education that impact on their effectiveness?*
4. *On the basis of the four case studies, is it possible to identify significant differences in the effectiveness of a) funding consortia and franchise partnerships and b) looser and more formalised partnerships?*
5. *What are the barriers to effective partnership operation?*
6. *What are the practices adopted by partnerships that appear to be most effective in widening participation?*
7. *Are there critical success factors in effective partnerships?*

Methods

The methods of conducting the research involved a combination of a review of secondary sources and fieldwork. The two main elements were:

- a literature review; and
- comparative, in-depth case studies of HETP and three other examples of partnerships between higher and further education in England.

Literature review

The review of the literature covered three main categories. The first category was a review of texts about method which was essential for making decisions about project methodology. It was necessary to ascertain appropriate options for the nature and scale of the project and become familiar with their application, by reviewing relevant texts. A range of sources was used in selecting and applying effectively the most appropriate methods for conducting the project. Some were of general application in relation to conducting educational research (Bell 2000, Cohen and Manion 2000, Philips & Pugh 1994 and Hammersley, Gomm & Wood 1994). Other sources were about the methods chosen for the project, including case studies (Gillham 2000) and interviews (Kvale 1996). Bassey (1999) provided the most practical and helpful of the texts that were specifically about undertaking case studies in education. The distance learning resource pack (NCWBLP 2001) that accompanied the research methods

module (DPS 4825) of the Master/Doctorate in Professional Studies was a useful first point of reference.

The second category was a review of policy texts issued by key Government bodies, including the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and HEFCE. The Government had identified widening participation as a major policy objective. As the focus of the doctorate is higher education *policy*, the review of a significant number of policy texts was a deliberate choice and was a logical starting point. It was judged that the review would provide insights into the creation and development of Government policy on widening participation in higher education. In relation to answering the research questions, the study of policy texts provided some explicit statements as to the intended outcomes of the various policy initiatives.

The third category of literature was the research monographs, journals, newspaper sources and conference presentations about higher education policy on widening participation and related areas. These sources offered different perspectives on policy developments and set them in a wider social, political, economic and historical context.

The resources of Middlesex University library were used to search its own holdings and electronic databases (for example, through an Athens account, ERIC and the British Education Index) to find out what had been written on the subject of widening participation and/or partnerships by other researchers or education journalists. The search keywords included: widening participation; increasing participation; partnerships; education; further education; higher education; access; and widening access, used singly and in various combinations.

As Parry and Thompson (2002) note, 'there is a sizeable literature concerned with the changing relationships between further education and higher education'. Their research charted the development of colleges as providers of higher education and provides a valuable summary of the related policy developments. Their work formed a major source of reference for this project, along with the "sizeable literature" about the further and higher education interface. The rich source of material is reflected in the review of the policy context for the project in Chapter 3.

Case study method

The case study method was chosen because it enabled an elaboration of cases of partnership between higher and further education as a means of adding to an

understanding of these phenomena. Bassey (1999) advocates the use of educational case studies 'as a prime research strategy for developing educational theory which illuminates policy and enhances practice.' One of the criticisms that has been levelled at the case study approach is that it is impossible to generalise from what is essentially a descriptive account of a single set of circumstances. However, Bassey's concept of 'fuzzy generalization' suggests that it is possible to derive findings from a single case study that may be capable of wider application. He argues that fuzzy generalizations represent a worthwhile contribution to the body of knowledge about education. In the case of this project, it was possible to derive fuzzy generalizations from four cases. The fuzzy generalizations were part of the process of identifying the common themes referred to in research question 3 that provided one of the starting points for developing the thematic analysis framework against which the case studies were analysed.

There are weaknesses in the case study approach. The value of the case study is determined by the reliability, robustness and validity of the data that it is possible to collect about the case. There were three potential areas of concern as regards the data for the project:

- the relatively small numbers of staff it was planned to interview for each case study;
- the possible deficiencies in student number data (already known to the researcher because of experience within her own partnership context); and
- researcher bias which may affect responses or interpretations of findings despite attempts to maintain objectivity.

The researcher was aware of these potential weaknesses and sought to triangulate information provided by respondents with partnership documents and data and the responses provided by other interviewees from the same partnership in an attempt to overcome them.

In a situation where one of the case studies is about the researcher's own workplace, as was the case with HETP, other factors come into play. These concern the benefits and difficulties involved in being a lead manager, professional insider and active researcher. The benefits for this research included ready access to whatever documentation and data were available about the partnership. Existing relationships with other key players in the partnership made it easy to set up interviews. A personal knowledge of the partnership and its activities made it possible to assess respondents'

statements against an existing schema of knowledge, as well as against the information derived from documents and data.

However, there is also the possibility that a professional insider is too close to the issues and events under consideration, making it hard to bring sufficient objectivity to their study. Moreover, colleagues may provide answers that they think the researcher wants to hear rather than a more honest assessment of circumstances. A corollary of this is that the researcher may interpret or infer things from responses to interview questions according to his/her mental map of the situation. An awareness of these possibilities for this project meant that special care was taken to seek to triangulate respondents' answers to questions against the documentary information available for the partnership and against the answers to the same questions from other respondents in the same partnership. For example, interviews with college representatives in a partnership were used to test the information that had been provided by the university partner about the services provided by the university in exchange for the administrative topslice.

Where the case studies are of unfamiliar situations that are nevertheless within one's professional field, similar issues obtain. In this case, every effort was made to maintain objectivity and not make assumptions about what might go on in a partnership simply things were done in a certain way in HETP.

Despite these reservations about the case study approach, it was nevertheless felt that the research would provide more information about a hitherto under-researched area of activity at the further/higher education interface. The information gathered from semi-structured interviews and an examination of partnership documentation and data would yield information that would enable a comparative, qualitative analysis of the cases to be undertaken and thereby provide answers to the research questions.

Action research, soft systems and survey methodologies

Before deciding on the case study approach, three other options for conducting the project were considered. The first was action research. This approach would have had the benefit of potentially leading to changes in practice in the HETP which was one of the aims of the research. However, the project did not lend itself to that approach as it was undertaken by a single researcher rather than by a team of colleagues working closely together to apply research outcomes to practical issues in a work context.

Moreover, much of the project's focus was about mapping and information gathering rather than action leading directly to changes in practice.

A second option was soft systems methodology. This approach is about identifying a problem and possible solutions to it and working to effect changes to arrive at the proposed ideal model. Again, given the aims of the research in relation to the HETP, this was initially an appealing approach. However, the issues or problems had not yet been fully articulated. The research was more about information gathering and mapping. Soft systems methodology could have been considered for a follow-up project but was inappropriate for a project of this scale.

The third option was to undertake a survey of different types of partnerships in England to provide evidence for the project. The same reasoning applies here as to soft systems methodology. Not enough was known at the outset about the issues to be able to frame questions for a survey. The purpose of the research was to find out about processes and develop knowledge about partnerships. On balance, the decision to use the case study approach was to enable four cases to be elaborated in depth rather than to provide a broader but more superficial survey of higher/further education partnerships. Even though the project was based on a small sample of cases that would make it hard to generalise findings, it was felt that case studies provided an opportunity to study in some detail the characteristics and activity of four examples of partnership. It was believed that this in-depth study of four partnerships would provide valuable insights that it might not be possible to obtain by means of a survey.

The case studies

Case study selection: franchise partnerships and HEFCE-recognised funding consortia

It was decided to select four examples of partnership between higher and further education to form the case studies. The cases selected for the project provide two examples each of the two different models of indirect funding arrangement, the franchise partnership and the HEFCE-recognised funding consortium. When the research started, there were 60 higher education and 262 further education institutions involved in franchise partnership (HEFCE 2003/57) and seven funding consortia in England. It was essential to have examples of both types of indirect funding relationship as research question 4 was about trying to identify differences in the

behaviour and outcomes of the two models. The key features of the respective models are set out in the following paragraphs.

The franchise partnership model

Franchise partnerships are one of the two main ways of funding colleges indirectly to deliver higher education. A franchise partnership exists where a university (or other higher education institution) has an agreement with a further education college for the college to deliver higher education programmes for which the university receives funding from HEFCE. The university passes on the funding to the college, hence the college is indirectly funded by HEFCE for its work. The funding passed to the college is normally subject to a fee or 'topslice' charged by the university for the services it provides to the college in support of the programmes being delivered by the college.

HEFCE issued a circular report in December 2000 that described an indirectly funded franchise partnership as "one in which the student is attributed to the higher education institution for funding purposes but the course is wholly or partly delivered in the further education college". The report recognised that many franchise partnerships already existed. It set out the features of a franchise partnership and offered a code of practice for its operation. There was no attempt at prescribing the form that franchise partnerships should take; instead existing partnerships were urged to use the code of practice as the basis for reviewing partnership arrangements and new partnerships were asked to reflect the code in the arrangements they were establishing.

The key point about a franchise partnership is that the university partner is "fully responsible for the students and accountable for all aspects of finance, administration and quality relating to [the] students" following franchised higher education courses delivered by the college in the partnership. In that respect, it may be described as a hierarchical model, with the university clearly in the lead role.

The HEFCE-recognised funding consortium

In the same document in 2000, HEFCE spelt out the features of a funding consortium, a new form of indirect funding arrangement based on the principle that all members were of equal status. Each consortium should be composed of a cluster of colleges and generally a university (or other higher education institution). The consortium must have a lead institution, which may be a university or a further education college, as long as the lead institution is already in receipt of direct funding from HEFCE. Funding

for the consortium flows through the lead institution. In those funding consortia where the lead institution is a university, the funding that is passed on to college members of the consortium is subject to a charge or topslice for the validation and other services provided by the university to college partners. Subject to the terms of any validation agreement, responsibility for assuring quality rests with the individual institution providing the programme. This contrasts with the franchise partnership model where the university partner is responsible for quality. The student numbers included in the consortium continue to belong to the individual institution, but the consortium contract provides for the redeployment of numbers by agreement between all the consortium members. The lead institution is responsible for co-ordinating and returning to HEFCE the annual aggregate student data surveys. In the case of individualised student data returns, however, each member of the consortium is responsible for making these to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in the case of university members of the consortium, or to the LSC in the case of college members. This is the other key distinction from the franchise partnership, where the university is responsible for making individualised student data returns on behalf of the institutions with which it is in partnership.

Distinctions between the two models of indirect funding arrangement

HEFCE identified the principles of effective indirectly funded franchise partnerships and funding consortia. There are seven principles for franchise partnerships and six for funding consortia. The principles broadly echo each other between the two models. The additional principle relating to franchise partnerships concerns quality and standards, one of the two key distinguishing features between the two models. It states that “the higher education institution should support the further education college in setting and maintaining expectations on quality and standards”; in a funding consortium, responsibility for quality rests with the individual institution providing the programme. The principles are set out in Appendix 3.

The other distinguishing feature between the two models of indirect funding arrangement is in relation to data collection and returns, as explained in the section about funding consortia above.

The distinctions between the two models are set out in an annex to the same HEFCE report. The annex specifies in detail the responsibilities of institutions in both forms of partnership. Those that are relevant to this report are presented in Appendix 4. A further distinction is that institutions wishing to form a funding consortium must

demonstrate to HEFCE that they meet the criteria laid down in the code of practice. Those that do are known as HEFCE-recognised funding consortia. No such stipulation applies to franchise partnerships, although the institutions involved do need to notify HEFCE that they wish to establish an indirect funding arrangement between them.

The four case studies

The examples of higher/further education partnerships selected to be the case studies were:

- i. Higher Education and Training Partnership (HETP): a funding consortium involving Middlesex University and four further education colleges in north London and west Essex;
- ii. Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF): a funding consortium involving Staffordshire University and 11 colleges (10 further education and one sixth form college) in Staffordshire and Shropshire;
- iii. Anglia Polytechnic University Regional University Partnership: a series of franchise partnerships between Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) and 23 colleges (22 in the further education sector and one in the higher education sector) mostly located in the Eastern region of England; and
- iv. Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education: a series of franchise partnerships between the University of Luton and four colleges (three further education and one sixth form college) in Luton and Bedfordshire.

The case study partnerships differ in size in terms of the number of partners and the volume of higher education delivered by college partners. The geographical and political context also differs between the four partnerships. Three of the partnerships have had a dedicated partnership office since their inception while one has only just established an office in October 2003 after 10 years without one.

HETP was chosen as it provided the context for the researcher's professional work and doctorate. It was the primary organisation on which the outcomes of the project were intended to have an impact. Between 1998 and 2003, HETP was a funding consortium comprising Middlesex University, as the lead institution, and four further education colleges. Four of the five partners are located in north London while the fifth institution

is located in west Essex. The other partnerships were selected to provide comparisons with HETP.

The second case study, SURF, is a funding consortium between Staffordshire University, nine colleges in Staffordshire and two in Shropshire. The reason for selecting SURF was that it appeared to offer similarities and contrasts to HETP. The similarities were the history that led to its formation, its form as a funding consortium, the nature of the relationships between partner institutions, and its size, in terms of the number of students following higher education programmes at partner colleges. The contrasts were its geographical location, the number of partners involved and its success in securing additional external funding. A further reason for choosing SURF was the chance to explore whether it was possible to discern the effects on the consortium of the high profile advocacy of this model of further and higher education collaboration by Staffordshire University's vice chancellor. This provided a contrast to the HETP context, where some of Middlesex University's senior staff appeared ambivalent about the benefits of the partnership. There were very good links between SURF and HETP as a consequence of their involvement in the Consortium of Funding Consortia, an informal grouping of HEFCE-recognised funding consortia that met two or three times a year.

The two franchise partnerships, led by APU and the University of Luton respectively, were chosen because they appeared to offer contrasting examples of the franchise partnership model. The APU Regional University Partnership comprises a large, high profile and well-established network of relationships between APU and 23 colleges, mostly in the Eastern region of England. One of the colleges in the Eastern region, Harlow College, had chosen to align itself to Middlesex University, as a member of HETP, rather than to APU. Yet representatives of the college in question cited examples of ways in which they perceived the APU partnership model to be superior to HETP. Choosing APU as a case study provided the opportunity to look more closely at the way APU ran its partnership with colleges. The researcher had good links with the Director of APU's Regional Office as a result of a common professional interest in higher/further education partnership developments.

The fourth case study, the Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education, is a small and relatively informal collaborative arrangement between the University of Luton and four colleges. Its area includes the conurbation of Luton and Dunstable and the more rural parts of Bedfordshire. The researcher had some prior informal knowledge of partnership activities between the University of Luton and partner

colleges. This suggested that there had been several drives to refocus the partnership, in response to Government initiatives, to improve collaboration and thereby levels of higher education participation in the area served by the five institutions concerned. Yet there appeared to be little concrete evidence of the success of the refocusing activities. This situation echoed the HETP experience in some ways. Choosing the Bedfordshire Federation as a case study provided an opportunity to explore the drivers for their partnership activity and how far they had been successful.

Initial approach to case studies

Once the case studies had been selected, contact was made with the senior member of staff in the universities concerned who had responsibility for partnership activity and/or widening participation. Their agreement to be involved in the project was secured. They were provided with a brief written statement about the project. The statement spelt out the terms of engagement on which interviews would be conducted and what would happen to the information gathered in this way. More detail about this aspect of the method is provided in a later section.

Documentation from the case studies

Documents relating to the partnerships provided one of three evidence sources for the case studies, the others being student number data and information from semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 5). The minimum documentation that was requested from each partnership was a copy of their partnership agreement, the financial agreement or details of the financial contract/s between the lead and partner institutions and details of the higher education programmes delivered by partner colleges over a three year period between 1999-2000 and 2001-02. A copy of the partnership agreement was received in all cases, although the APU agreement was being revised to take account of recent developments in the partnership. All partnerships provided information about the higher education programmes being delivered by partner colleges.

Apart from HETP, no written information about the financial arrangements underpinning each partnership was received. Instead, this information was conveyed verbally by the heads of partnership in two cases and by a college representative in the third case. In each case, the information provided was confirmed by other members of the partnership. In three out of the four case studies, there was a request not to use information about financial arrangements in the case studies or the final report, on the

basis that it was 'commercially sensitive'. The restriction on using the financial information was disappointing but perhaps not surprising in the light of the lack of transparency generally about this issue. However, in relation to answering research question 2, it meant that a potential measure was lost.

In addition to the minimum documentation, all partnerships provided copies of marketing materials. Two provided copies of quality assurance handbooks. A third described the wealth of information that was available to partnership members via the university intranet that partner colleges could access. One partnership provided copies of minutes of meetings of the partnership from which it was possible to trace developments over the period of the partnership's existence.

Student number data

The design of the research included the collection of data from the case study partnerships as a quantitative means of measuring their contribution to widening participation. Issues around the collection of data were familiar to the researcher before embarking on the project. There had been difficulties in HETP about collecting accurate data about colleges' higher education students and further difficulties about ensuring that data returns were sent to the appropriate bodies. These stemmed partly from the fact that the colleges' management information function was primarily geared towards meeting LSC requirements in respect of their further education students rather than sending information about higher education students to either Middlesex University or the LSC. The additional factor of complying with the principle that members of funding consortia were responsible for returning individualised student number returns to the appropriate body (HESA for university partners and LSC for college partners) was seen by college staff as an additional burden that would not have applied if they had been involved in a franchise arrangement. Efforts were made to obtain the most complete and comprehensive set of data about partnerships' higher education activity. The issue of data collection and transfer was raised in semi-structured interviews with university and college respondents to try and capture the most complete picture possible for each case study.

.Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because it was felt that talking to people directly involved in partnerships would yield deeper insights about the nature of their partnerships, particularly in response to research questions 5, 6 and 7, than would be

obtained from responses to a paper-based or electronic questionnaire. In partnerships, success frequently depends upon the strength of the working relationships between individuals. Personal interviews made it possible to probe the nuances of meaning in responses to oral questions.

Using a set of common questions (see Appendix 6) for all respondents meant that it was possible to cross-refer what had been said by colleagues within the same partnership in response to a question as well as compare the responses from other partnerships. Follow-up questions were tailored to individual respondents and used to amplify responses or check understanding. Despite the structure provided by the common set of questions, it should be acknowledged that there might still have been bias in the way in which the questions were asked that invited particular responses. Steps were taken to guard against this by using a common script to ensure that all respondents had the opportunity to respond to the same questions. In addition, respondents were also invited to provide additional comments if they felt that the questions did not address important aspects of their partnership. The semi-structured style enabled diversions as required to probe responses and provide answers to research questions. Insider knowledge helped this process.

The notes or transcripts of interviews from the same partnership were, where possible, cross-checked before speaking to new respondents so that issues gleaned from previous interviews could be explored in more depth. Therefore, while it is impossible to guard totally against bias using this approach, it was believed that semi-structured interviews would be the best means of obtaining useful information to supplement or explain the numerical information and documentary evidence that had been acquired.

Research instruments

The 15 questions used in the semi-structured interviews were designed to yield information that would enable the research questions to be answered:

- Questions 1-3, 5 & 9 were about the history, background and purpose of the partnership to see if those were rooted in widening participation (main research question)
- Questions 4, 7 & 8 sought to reveal whether and how partnerships measured their contribution to widening participation (research question 2)
- Question 12 asked about partners' expectations of the partnership (research questions 3, 4 & 7)

- Questions 13 & 14 asked respectively about the benefits and costs of the partnership (research questions 3, 4 & 7)
- Question 15 asked how partners assessed the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements (main research question, research questions 3, 4 & 7)
- Question 11 asked what further steps would be required to achieve partnership aims and objectives (research questions 3 & 5)
- Question 10 asked about barriers or constraints to partnership arrangements (research question 5)
- Question 6 was specifically about strategies to widen participation (research question 6).

The questions were drafted on the basis of the researcher's knowledge of partnerships and influenced by initial reading of the literature. A colleague from the Staffordshire University partnership (SURF) reviewed and commented on the draft questions for the semi-structured interviews. The instrument was revised in the light of his comments. The questions were piloted with colleagues in the researcher's own partnership. No subsequent amendments were made following the interviews with HETP colleagues.

All the interviews with HETP representatives were conducted before starting the interviews with colleagues in other partnerships. This established the framework and enabled the researcher to develop the interview style in a familiar context. HETP interviews took place between October and December 2002. Interviews with colleagues in the other three partnerships took place between December 2002 and April 2003. There was no attempt to complete the interviews for one case study before beginning those for the next; it was a case of identifying dates that were convenient to the respondents in all case studies.

Selection of respondents

The research design included the identification of categories of respondents:

- the overall head of the partnership;
- a sample of the heads or deputy heads of the institutions involved in the partnership; and
- a sample of the HE co-ordinators in the colleges in the partnership.

For HETP, a series of interviews was arranged with selected colleagues who were directly involved in the partnership, either as head/deputy heads of the partner

institutions or as coordinators of higher education activity in the partner colleges. In each of the other three case studies, the partnership head (from the university in each case) arranged or facilitated the arrangement of interviews with other stakeholders in the partnership. In two cases, the partnership head provided lists of possible interviewees, including heads of institutions and those responsible for higher education partnership activity in partner colleges. The actual choice of whom to interview was left to the researcher although some suggestions were made as to people that the researcher would find it particularly helpful to interview. Some of these were followed up while other respondents were chosen at random. In the third instance, the researcher was pointed in the direction of one colleague only as being the most useful person to talk to. While this advice was acted upon, several colleagues representing other colleges in the partnership were also interviewed for the case study. In all cases, the number of respondents selected by the researcher outweighed those recommended by the lead university contact. The researcher was conscious that bias, other than that potentially represented in the recommendations by university lead contacts, might affect the choice of respondents. She strove to combat that by choosing a combination of respondents recommended by lead university contacts and others selected at random.

It was important to talk to a range of people to obtain different perspectives on the respective partnerships. This approach was preferred to conducting a questionnaire of all staff involved in the respective partnerships, as a means of acquiring depth of knowledge about the partnerships at the expense of a broader but more superficial knowledge. The perspectives were shaped by a number of factors: the sector they represented; the history of the partnership; their perceptions of the costs and benefits of partnership activity, including the relations between their institution and partner institutions; and their positions within their institutions.

A total of 27 interviews were conducted of which six were with higher education staff and 21 with further education staff. Table 1 shows the breakdown of different categories of staff selected for interview. While the sample from each case study was not large, it did include at least one person in each of the categories identified as having valuable insights into the partnership in which they were involved.

| Table 1: Details of respondents selected for semi-structured interviews | | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|--|---|
| Staff interviewed | HETP | SURF | APU Regional University Partnership | Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education |
| Overall head of partnership or person responsible for partnership activities in general | N/A (Researcher) | 1 (university based) | 1 (university based) | 1 (university based) |
| Heads/deputy heads of institutions in the partnership | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| HE co-ordinators in partnership colleges | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Other | - | 1 | - | - |
| Total number of staff interviewed | 9 | 6 | 7 | 5 |

Of the 27 interviews, 18 were face to face and the remainder were by telephone. The telephone interviews made up the final batch as it proved difficult to arrange face to face meetings with all selected respondents.

Terms of engagement for semi-structured interviews

Respondents were provided with a copy of a briefing document in advance of the interview. At the beginning of the interview, respondents were reminded about the purpose of the interviews and the use that it was intended to make of the outcomes. They were told that the name of the partnership would be used in the final report but that their individual role and institution would be anonymised. It was made clear that the partnership head would have the opportunity to comment on the final case study. The following is an extract from the briefing document:

I expect to spend between three to five days with each case study partnership or collaborative arrangement. I will request some information in advance of meeting colleagues in the case study organisations, but recognise that some may be regarded as confidential. The type of information I will be seeking is: partnership agreements or memoranda of cooperation, information about joint or validated programmes, data about student enrolment, retention and achievement. Following the visits to each case study organisation, I will write

up the case study. I will share the case study report with the partnership and/or the institutions involved to enable colleagues to comment on accuracy and interpretation. I will agree in advance with the partnership or institutions in the collaborative arrangement how I would want to use the case study findings in the project report. The questions I will want to ask in each case study are attached as an Annex to this briefing.

The transcripts (taken from notes rather than tape recordings) of interviews were shared with interviewees, who were invited to comment on their content. All responded positively. Information from the semi-structured interviews was triangulated, where possible, against written information and/or the responses of other interviewees. Information from the review of documentation and data and the semi-structured interviews was drawn together to form the four case studies. Each case study was written to a common template, set out in Appendix 7.

When the first drafts of the case studies were complete, they were shared with the partnership head to give them an opportunity to comment on accuracy and tone. It was agreed with the partnership head how the case study findings would be used in the final project report. In the case of three partnerships, issues were raised about including what was described as commercially sensitive financial information in the case studies. These responses created a tension between research ethics and a desire to use the information. As confidentiality had been guaranteed in the original terms of engagement, there was no option but to omit the information about financial agreements from the case studies in question. Having removed it from three case studies, it seemed appropriate to remove it from the remaining case study. The veto on using details of the financial agreement was disappointing and detracts from the comprehensiveness of the case studies. It also takes away a potential measure of partnerships' operations (research question 2). However, it is consistent with a wider lack of transparency about the financial agreements underpinning higher/further education partnerships.

Answering the research questions

Table 2 sets out which methods were intended to answer each of the research questions.

| Table 2: Answering the research questions – methods adopted | | |
|--|---|---|
| No | Question | Method |
| 1 | What is the contribution of partnerships between higher and further education to Government objectives for widening participation in higher education? | Literature review; semi-structured interviews; comparative thematic analysis of case studies; analysis of data provided by cases |
| 2 | How is the contribution measured? | Semi-structured interviews (qualitative); data on growth in student numbers (quantitative) |
| 3 | To what extent is it possible to identify common themes in partnerships between higher and further education that impact on their effectiveness? | Review of documentation provided by cases; analysis of case studies using thematic framework; comparison with what was already known (from literature review) |
| 4 | On the basis of the four case studies, is it possible to identify significant differences in the effectiveness of a) funding consortia and franchise partnerships and b) looser and more formalised partnerships? | Semi-structured interviews; comparative thematic analysis of case studies |
| 5 | What are the barriers to effective partnership operation? | Semi-structured interviews; comparison with what was already known (from literature review) |
| 6 | What are the practices adopted by partnerships that appear to be most effective in widening participation? | Semi-structured interviews; comparison of responses with data provided by cases; comparison with what was already known (from literature review) |
| 7 | Are there critical success factors in effective partnerships? | As above |

Analysis of information

Three types of analysis were carried out on the case studies. First, they were analysed against a number of factual or descriptive factors including number of partners, type of partnership, stated aims and so on.

The second analysis was of the quantitative information supplied by the partnerships about their numbers of full-time equivalent students on higher education programmes

in partner colleges for the years 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02. In relation to the quantitative data, it was initially believed that, despite the potential issues about the availability and robustness of the data, it would be possible to obtain sufficient information to provide indications of trends that would support the findings emerging from an analysis of qualitative information. The quantitative aspect of the project was small. It was expected that the main contribution of the project would come from an elaboration of four cases to deepen the understanding of the nature and direction of partnerships rather than from a quantitative measurement of the contribution of partnerships to widening participation .

The final analysis of the case studies was thematic. The themes were derived and refined through five successive iterations. The starting points were fivefold:

- a conceptual analysis from the literature review of the drivers for widening participation through collaborative ventures
- the principles in the HEFCE codes of practice for franchise partnerships and funding consortia
- issues raised by HEFCE-recognised funding consortia
- the researcher's experience of collaborative ventures
- emerging issues from the case studies themselves (Bassey's fuzzy generalizations).

In relation to the first of these, Abramson et al (1996) had identified the partnership dividends for higher and further education institutions of working collaboratively. Themes had also emerged in discussions of the consortium of HEFCE-recognised funding consortia, where the focus had been on the differences between consortia and franchise partnerships. The researcher had included some of these themes or issues in letters written to HEFCE on behalf of the consortia. The leader of the second case study consortium had also identified the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the funding consortium model, as a contribution to a HEFCE review of support for the development of higher education in further education (HEFCE 2003a and HEFCE 2003b).

Arguably, it would have been appropriate to design the framework in advance of undertaking the case studies, on the basis of what was already known about partnerships. However, one of the reasons for conducting case studies was the relative lack of knowledge about how they worked and what they did. Developing the framework after some of the fieldwork had been carried out enabled the issues

captured in the case studies to be included. Many of the factors identified in the case studies confirmed earlier findings and strengthened the case for including them as part of the analysis framework.

The initial factors or themes were:

- clarity of partnership purpose
- commitment by senior staff
- transparency of financial arrangements and services provided
- transparency of other arrangements including quality assurance and data collection
- clarity as to the mutual benefits of the partnership
- evidence of value added
- conditions of service
- cultural differences
- location of responsibility for partnership management.

The second iteration included explicit versus implicit purposes of partnership, respective contributions of higher and further education partners to the partnership, tensions in relations between higher and further education partners, structural issues (eg differences between funding consortia and franchise partnerships) and external factors. The themes were further refined through three iterations until the analysis framework used for the report was reached. The final framework comprised three themes of external, structural and operational factors within which there was a total of 14 sub-themes or issues. The themes and issues that made up the analysis framework are presented in Table 3 below.

Once the analysis framework had been determined, a matrix was created using an Excel spreadsheet. The 14 sub-themes formed the vertical axis while the four cases formed the horizontal axis. The case studies were analysed manually against the framework, with the information from each case study in relation to each issue being entered into the respective cell. No other software package was used in the analysis. There were clearly limitations to this approach which relied on the researcher drawing from the various data from the case studies examples of the themes and issues that formed the analytical framework. While every effort was made to do this systematically, inevitably the exercise was a subjective one. However, the analysis did confirm that all the themes and issues were ones that applied to a greater or lesser extent in all four case studies.

| Table 3: Summary of issues used to analyse case studies | |
|---|--|
| Theme | Issues |
| External factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different methodologies in higher and further education for funding; • different methodologies in higher and further education for data collection; • different methodologies in higher and further education for quality assurance; • different terms and conditions of service in the two sectors; and • location of partnerships and the administrative boundaries of bodies that bear upon higher and/or further education |
| Structural factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purpose of the partnership • form of partnership, ie whether it was a franchise arrangement or funding consortium • nature of the infrastructure in support of the partnership • partnership agreement, including the financial agreement • cultural differences between higher and further education |
| Operational factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • programme planning, development and delivery • marketing • internal competition for students • access to facilities of the respective universities |

As regards the robustness of the framework, while it was impossible to eliminate bias entirely, there was an awareness of the potential for it to influence thinking. The researcher started with a view about some of the issues affecting partnerships' behaviour and outcomes that the literature broadly supported. In the interviews, respondents confirmed that many of the issues were factors in their partnerships in their answers to open rather than closed questions, thus suggesting that these themes were defined already. The framework appeared to offer a robust basis for undertaking a qualitative analysis of the case studies.

CHAPTER 3: POLICY CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides the background and context for the project. The literature reviewed for the chapter was of two types. The first type was the policy texts issued by key Government bodies, including the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and HEFCE. The second source of references was the research monographs, journals, newspaper sources and conference presentations about the development of higher education policy in relation to widening participation and the implementation of policy. The texts were chosen because they covered particular policy developments (in the case of the policy texts) or because they provided historical or contextual commentary on the developments in question.

The first part of the chapter traces the development of Government policy relating to widening participation. It focuses on the policy initiatives that have widening participation at their heart or as a component element, concluding with a critique of the 2003 White Paper on the future of higher education. The second part of the chapter relates the development of policy to the development of partnerships between higher and further education. Such partnerships between higher and further education may be viewed as one of the instruments for delivering widening participation. This role has been recognised more explicitly over the course of the last six to seven years.

Policy development: widening participation in higher education

It is possible to trace policy development on widening access to higher education through a series of phases and milestones over a 40-year period from 1963 to 2003. The key policy documents are the White Papers and Acts of Parliament that changed the shape of the higher and further education sectors. The documents that served as the instruments of policy implementation are largely the circulars and other documents from the successive funding councils for higher education in England, latterly HEFCE. The phases and milestones are summarised in Figure 1 below and expanded in the following paragraphs.

Figure 1: Phases and milestones on the path to widening participation

1963 to mid 1980s – Post-Robbins expansion

Creation of polytechnics and opening up of higher education to many more people

Mid 1980s to early 1990s – Market-led expansion of higher education

Massive growth of higher education much of it funded on a fees only basis

1998 Education Reform and the release of polytechnics and colleges of higher education from local authority control

1992 – Further and Higher Education Act

Independence for colleges from local education authorities

University status for polytechnics

1997-98 – New Government, “education, education, education”

New Labour Government: education and the modernisation of public services at the core of its manifesto

Publication of Kennedy and Dearing reports

The Learning Age, response to the Dearing report

1998-2001 – Instruments of policy implementation

HEFCE widening participation instruments

Introduction of new funding vehicle, the funding consortium

Launch of foundation degrees

2001 – Birth of the Learning and Skills Council

New organisation with a funding and planning remit for all post-16 education, excluding higher education

2001 – The 50% participation target

Labour Party manifesto: target of 50% participation of 18-30 year olds in higher education by 2010

2002-03 – Policy overdrive in higher and further education

Implementation of Partnerships for Progression initiative

November 2002, *Success for All, Reforming Further Education*,

January 2003, White Paper, *The future of higher education*

July 2003, White Paper, *21st century skills – realising our potential*

Source: Anderson 2003

Post-Robbins expansion

The current drive to expand access to a university education is the third such burst of activity in the last 40 years. The first major attempt to broaden the base of people with a university education came in the 1960s in the wake of the Robbins report (1963). The report stimulated the creation of thousands of additional higher education places and also paved the way for the Open University to be established. The resulting

expansion in higher education places was a direct result of a public policy with a reforming intention to democratise higher education (Scott 2003).

Market-led expansion of higher education

The period of expansion from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s may be seen as the second phase. This increase in student numbers in higher education was largely a market phenomenon. It was not a planned expansion but continued until the funding for growth was capped in the mid 1990s. Scott (2003) described this period of expansion as “a mass system of higher education acquired absent-mindedly”.

The 1988 Education Reform Act released polytechnics and some colleges of higher education from local authority control. The years that followed were, according to Parry (1996), the ‘peak years of expansion’. Colleges, for their part, were keen to develop or expand their higher education provision. Some colleges already had a long tradition of offering higher education or higher level vocational or professional courses, frequently on a part-time basis, to those already in employment.

Much of the growth in both higher and further education institutions was funded on a “fees only” basis. This meant that institutions received no per capita funding from the funding councils but aimed to cover their costs from the tuition fees paid by higher education students. Some higher education institutions chose to increase their recruitment from fees only students as a means of offsetting reductions in income from the funding councils, “occasioning a spectacular expansion of numbers in some institutions” (Parry and Thompson 2002). Some further education colleges were so keen to expand their higher education provision that they cross-subsidised it from funding allocated for further education¹.

While the period was characterised by growth in the numbers of people accessing higher education, the expansion did little to challenge existing social class distribution in higher education and ‘failed to challenge the culture of elitism that characterises our higher education system’ (Smith and Bocock 1999). This was in spite of the aims of the 1987 White Paper to increase admissions from students with qualifications other than A levels:

Widening participation was seen both as desirable in its own right and as the key to achieving the cost efficient expansion of student numbers in HE. Further expansion, it was suggested, could only be achieved by widening the entry base . . . (Smith and Bocock, 1999)

¹ Interviews with college principals, DPS5140 fieldwork, 2002-03

The Further and Higher Education Act

The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 was a major milestone in the development of relationships between further and higher education. The Act ushered in radical changes in the landscape of further and higher education. It freed colleges from local authority control and gave them responsibility for determining their own mission. It also granted university status to the polytechnics and some colleges of higher education, some of which began to move away from vocationally oriented sub-degree provision, leaving the market open for colleges to move into.

A key aspect of the White Papers that prefigured the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act was to establish the role of further education 'as a strategic site for expanding participation, increasing achievement and building progression' (Parry 1996).

New Labour Government: "Education, education, education"

The election in 1997 of a new Labour Government, with its commitment to modernisation of the public sector and "education, education, education" (Blair 1997) is the next major milestone. The third burst of expansion in higher education is different to the two that preceded it. It is not part of a great public project to democratise higher education nor is it market-led expansion. Instead, it is part of the Government's agenda to modernise the public sector (Scott 2003).

1997 saw the publication of two influential reports, one on further education and one on higher education, both commissioned under the previous Conservative administration. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) reported on the work of the committee chaired by Helena Kennedy QC in *Learning works: Widening participation in further education*. Although the focus of the report was firmly on widening participation in further rather than higher education, it rehearsed similar issues for the adjacent sector and played a significant part in stimulating the creation of targeted funds for widening participation projects.

The second influential report of 1997, *Higher education in the learning society*, came from the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Lord Dearing. Parry (2001) described the appointment of the Dearing Committee as a "pause for reflection on the consequences of marketization, massification and regulation" when the tensions inherent in Government policy that sought to reduce costs, increase

student numbers, widen access, extend diversity and improve quality became impossible to ignore. The Committee was given the task of taking 'a fresh and comprehensive look' at the future of British higher education. In tackling its task, the Committee had an 'uneven engagement' with the research, analysis and academic literatures (Parry 1999) that might otherwise have informed its thinking and recommendations for future action. In the context of this research, an interesting point is the primacy of the Committee's recommendations for increased expansion and widened participation. What makes it interesting is that 'issues of access and participation were neither the subject of a separate working group nor were they necessarily the focus of systematic investigation in depth and breadth' (ibid). Indeed, Parry describes the base of statistical information as regards this area as 'generally slim'.

The Dearing report made a total of 93 recommendations, the first of which called for long term expansion in higher education, largely at sub-degree level, thereby fulfilling its remit to maximise participation in initial higher education and lifelong learning. The lack of an evidence base raises some doubts about the basis for the recommendations in support of increased expansion and widened participation and particularly the role that colleges were to be given in helping to deliver these aims. It raises a question as to whether the recommendation that priority in growth should be given to further education colleges was linked to a view in the policy community – unsupported by evidence – that higher education delivered by further education colleges was bound to be cheaper than that delivered by universities. The following year, HEFCE and FEFC jointly commissioned a study on the relative costs of degree and higher national diploma programmes in colleges and universities.

In early 1998, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) responded to the Dearing report in the publication *The Learning Age: Higher education for the 21st century*. The foreword to the document set out the Government's commitment to lifelong learning:

We are embarking on a new era in which old divides are broken down and access is opened up to those who previously had no expectation of returning to learn. Already over half of those in higher education are mature students and over a third are part-timers. (DfEE 1998)

Chapter 1 of the document was entitled *Increasing participation and widening access*. The introduction to the chapter states the case even more forcefully:

Increasing opportunities for people to learn and widening access are at the heart of this Government's policies for creating a learning society. The Government is committed to the principle that anyone who has the capability for

higher education should have the opportunity to benefit from it and we will therefore lift the cap on student plans imposed by the last government. Our priority is to reach out and include those who have been under-represented in higher education, including young people from semi-skilled or unskilled family backgrounds and from disadvantaged localities and people with disabilities.
(ibid)

The Learning Age also accepted the Dearing recommendation that growth in sub-degree provision should take place mainly in further education colleges, adding a rider that “it would expect much existing provision in higher education institutions to be maintained and, in some cases, expanded”. For some in the further education sector, the rider signalled the strength of a higher education lobby in the new universities that wanted a share of the proposed growth in sub-degree provision.

Instruments of policy implementation

Between 1998 and 2001, the next phase of development, HEFCE issued a series of circulars giving effect to the recommendations of the Dearing report and the emerging Government policy that was based on those recommendations. The circulars were, in effect, instruments of change aimed at widening participation. HEFCE described the introduction of targeted funding for widening participation as “the first stage of a longer-term initiative and . . . part of a wider programme to improve access and participation to higher education for under-represented groups”. The initiatives introduced by these circulars included:

- Three-year institutional widening participation strategies with action plans tied to funding (HEFCE 98/39, 99/33, 00/50, 01/29)*
- Premium funding (HEFCE 98/39, 99/33)
- Additional student numbers (HEFCE 98/56, 99/56, 00/39, 01/54)
- Capacity-building regional projects (HEFCE 98/39, 99/33)
- Holistic approaches to widening participation strategies, including integrating them with learning and teaching strategies (HEFCE 01/36, 01/37)
- Higher education in further education colleges (HEFCE 98/58, 98/59, 00/09, 01/32)
- Collaboration between further and higher education (HEFCE 99/63, 00/54)
- Partnership with the LSC to launch Partnerships for Progression (HEFCE 01/73).

* The references in brackets are the numbers of examples of relevant HEFCE circular/s.

Following research into the relative costs of higher education in colleges and universities, HEFCE consulted in 1998 on their proposals for funding higher education provision in colleges. The following year, 1999, HEFCE announced a new form of indirect funding arrangement, the funding consortium. The period saw the transfer of funding responsibility for all programmes leading to higher national certificates or higher national diplomas from FEFC to HEFCE.

Two years after *The Learning Age* came the launch, in 2000, of a new sub-degree qualification, the foundation degree. The foundation degree was the first new higher education qualification for some 20 years. It was billed as “a new qualification for a new age” (HEFCE 2000c). The foreword to the prospectus that invited bids for prototype funding described it thus:

The foundation degree has the potential to raise the skill level of our workforce, particularly in the new industries. It will forge new alliances between universities, colleges and employers. It will bring more people into higher education with a richer mix of backgrounds than ever before. (HEFCE 2000c)

The birth of the Learning and Skills Council

The year 2001 saw the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This followed the DfEE's announcement in 1999 of a review of post-16 education and training in *Learning to succeed: A new framework for post-16 learning*. LSC has not only a funding but also a planning remit for all of post-16 education and training, excluding higher education. Its creation represented the biggest organisational or structural change to the post-16 landscape since the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.

The 50% participation target

The second event highlighted in 2001 is central to the widening participation agenda. It is the commitment in the Labour Party election manifesto to a target that, by the year 2010, 50% of people between the ages of 18 and 30 will have had the opportunity to experience higher education. For those who had welcomed *The Learning Age's* commitment to lifelong learning, the focus on the 18-30 year old age group was a major disappointment.

Nevertheless, the target signalled the latest push to drive up the participation rate in higher education in England and, in particular, to increase participation by people who might not otherwise choose to pursue study at degree level. The 50% target began as

a straight target to increase access to higher education. However, a study by the Institute for Employment Studies (1996) revealed a projected shortfall in the number of graduates with appropriate skills to contribute to the drive for international economic competitiveness.

However, around the same time as the IES study, statistics from the DfEE revealed that increasing participation would require a widening of participation by groups who were currently under-represented in higher education. Middle class demand for higher education was thought to be close to saturation. Therefore, the only way to expand the system was for higher education institutions to reach out to different categories of students who were not currently participating in higher education. The greatest scope for increasing and widening participation lay in the more disadvantaged groups in society who are significantly under-represented in higher education. Although the underlying rationale for the target was still an economic one, the means of reaching it shifted so that it became a more socially inclusive target, aimed at attracting into universities people who had no family record of higher education and who had entry qualifications other than the normal 'gold standard' A levels.

Critics of the target focus on four issues: how the figure was arrived at; whether there is a need for such a target; its link to the skill needs of the economy; and its focus on 18-30 year olds. The Education and Skills Select Committee commented on the first of these issues, prompted by the evidence of witnesses at a hearing in 2003, but nevertheless went on to endorse the underlying link with economic competitiveness:

The 50% target is, so far as we can judge, an arbitrarily chosen Government target. . . . Nonetheless, there is scope for growth in higher education because there is a need in the economy for more highly skilled people. (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2003)

On the second issue, the Committee heard evidence that challenged the need for the 50% target. A report from the Higher Education Policy Institute (2003) suggested that the proportion of 18-year olds with two or more A levels would continue to increase and may reach 46% by 2010. Increased undergraduate demand, coupled with population increases, would mean that natural demand would ensure achievement of the target without the need for a policy to stimulate additional demand.

Addressing the third issue, Rendel (2002) challenges the target, describing it as very narrow and "based simply on an estimate of the skill needs of the economy". He continues, "[The government's] is a 'production line' vision of higher education." Earlier initiatives to widen participation in higher education were also couched in terms of

benefits to the economy of a better-qualified workforce. Some writers appear to accept at face value the underlying assumption that increased participation in higher education will improve UK economic performance. For example,

With increasing global trade pressures employment patterns are shifting and multi-skilling requirements now encourage employers to hire a knowledge-based workforce for the twenty-first century. (Watt and Paterson, 2000)

and

If the UK needs more educated workers to compete in global markets, then we must begin to transform the way we think about education. (ibid)

Not all writers accept this view. For example, Fuller (2001) refers to the policy rhetoric that suggests 'that successful economic performance can be linked with the level of education, training and qualifications in the workforce'. She looks at the trend towards qualification inflation or credential inflation that has arisen partly as a result of changes in the labour market and partly as the result of education policies that have reinforced the importance of qualifications. She argues that some of the growth in participation in recent years – particularly in part-time courses – may be interpreted as indicative of adults returning to the workplace making rational decisions about the need for higher level qualifications when facing a competitive job market rather than there being a proven need for higher level skills in order to do certain jobs. These points are echoed by Wolf (2002) who argues that one of the reasons for increased higher education participation is the number of people seeking not to be left behind in the qualifications and earnings game. Fuller refers to a survey undertaken by Brennan et al (1999) of part-time students and former students that explored the links between their studies and their employment, suggesting that their work should be the foundation for further research into 'the social and economic benefits of part-time higher education to individuals, employers and nationally'.

Nevertheless, the link between the 50% target and the economy was reiterated in a speech by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in 2003:

Changes in the workplace demand increases in the country's skill base. Our target for 50% of 18-30 year olds to attend university by 2010 is vital to our economic future. (Clarke 2003)

Commentators (including Tuckett 2003) who are concerned that the target focuses purely on 18-30 year olds regret the departure from the vision of lifelong learning set out in *The Learning Age*. Schuller (2002) reflects that "the government's welcome commitment to expanding higher education may backfire" because "if targets are unthinkingly applied they distort policy." He argues that it is not enough to recruit more widely among the 18-30 age group to achieve genuine widening of participation and

that what is needed are “recurrent opportunities for people to re-enter the system at any age”. Rendel describes the limitation of the target to the younger age group as “hampering all efforts to cater for individual needs”. The Education and Skills Select Committee also reflected on the continued focus on those aged 18-30, commenting that “the needs of those who fall outside that category must be properly taken into account if the higher education sector is to provide truly improved access”.

Policy overdrive in further and higher education

The final phase in the journey to date is the period 2002-03, a period of high activity for policy in the further and higher education sectors. The period saw the implementation of the joint HEFCE/LSC initiative, Partnerships for Progression. The initiative has the aim of getting universities, colleges and schools to work together on a regional basis on activities designed to raise the aspirations of young people and their awareness of higher education. Initially launched as the new “big idea” to make widening participation a reality, funding levels for the initiative have not matched early indications that substantial additional funding would be made available for its implementation. It was subsumed in 2002 under the broader DfES *Aimhigher* initiative, one of whose key aims is to help widen participation in UK higher education, particularly among students from non-traditional backgrounds, minority groups and disabled persons.

In late 2002 came *Success for All: Reforming further education*, a strategy document from the DfES that has far-reaching implications for the learning and skills sector, including the potential to reconfigure the sector to balance supply and demand for education and training. In early 2003, a White Paper, *The future of higher education*, was published. This document maintains the steer towards widening participation with a reduced emphasis on the 50% target but an increased focus on fair access. This is the key document for the next phase of development and is analysed in more detail below.

Later in 2003, the White Paper, *21st century skills – realising our potential*, was published by the DfES. This is primarily focused on skills at Level 2 and Level 3 in the further education qualifications framework. Its thrust is consistent with the higher education White Paper: education and training providers in the learning and skills sector have a key role to play in helping the Government achieve its skills targets in the context of international competitiveness.

The 2003 White Paper: The future of higher education

The White Paper on the future of higher education was published in January 2003. Its key areas of focus were the quality of teaching and research, increasing access to higher education and student finance. The area with the most immediate and obvious relevance to widening participation is that of increasing access. The White Paper confirmed the Government's commitment to the widening of participation:

All those who have the potential to benefit from higher education should have the opportunity to do so. This is a fundamental principle that lies at the heart of building a more socially just society, because education is the best and most reliable route out of poverty and disadvantage. (DfES 2003a)

However, the document steps away from the absolute 50% target:

. . . we believe that our target to increase participation in higher education towards 50 per cent of those aged 18-30 by the end of the decade . . . is right. (ibid)

Scott (2003) sees this as a jettisoning by the Government of the 50% target. He argues the need to maintain a commitment to the target on two grounds. First, expansion of higher education is the surest way of widening access and second, the target is about modernisation: "50% participation is what is needed to keep up with demand for graduate labour" (Scott 2003).

However, the White Paper is clear that "the further increase we need to achieve 50 per cent by 2010 is relatively modest." It cites the current participation level as 43%. The document stresses that expansion towards the 50% target will require different forms of higher education rather than 'more of the same', to use the term in the White Paper. The White Paper also signals a subtle shift of focus, away from broad-brush widening participation, towards the concept of fair access to "the most prestigious universities". The shift recognises that many of the students who fall into the category of non-traditional, widening participation students are concentrated in inner city, modern universities, not the so-called prestigious universities. Layer is critical of an over-emphasis on the 'fair access' objective. He describes it as "a narrow perspective that assumes that this is what learners want and is appropriate for them" (Layer 2003).

The area of student finance is particularly relevant to policy development in widening participation. The White Paper introduced the prospect of differentiated tuition fees, giving institutions the possibility of charging up to a maximum of £3,000 a year. The tension between the need to pay for an expanded system of higher education and the

desire to attract currently under-represented groups into the system is neatly captured in the following extract:

The root of ministers' problems is that they have two conflicting aims. On the one hand, they are committed to increasing the numbers going to university and, specifically, to attracting more from poor backgrounds. On the other hand, they are determined that the extra money needed to expand universities . . . can no longer come from general taxation. So the government wants to attract more students from poorer homes yet also wants a student body that will on average be poorer to contribute more to the cost of degrees. (Baker 2003)

Floud (2003) noted that debt aversion would still remain a significant deterrent to potential students from lower socio-economic groups. This view was echoed in an Education Guardian profile of a working class student singled out as among the most able in his school but committed to achieving his personal and career goals without the financial burdens that going to university would impose on him and his family (Berliner 2003).

Another feature of the White Paper was the focus on the two-year foundation degree, launched in 2000, as the vehicle for increasing participation. The expectation was that foundation degrees would largely be delivered in modern universities or further education colleges working in partnership with universities. But, as Baker (2003) comments, "students will remain wary of foundation degrees until they get a clear signal that employers value them", a view echoed by Bakhradnia:

. . . the success of this concept depends on the initial two-year qualification developing a currency and popularity of its own, which in turn depends on students being satisfied that society in general, and employers in particular, will value it. That has not yet been shown . . . (Bakhradnia 2003)

Scott (2003) described the planned expansion through foundation degrees as "ghetto growth of higher education for the working classes" reflecting the view of others who saw the proposal doing little to challenge the social class structure of higher education.

The White Paper noted the important part played by further education colleges in delivering higher education. It quantified further education's contribution at 11% of the total higher education delivered in England. It noted the strengths of further education in providing progression ladders for students, meeting the needs of part-time students and those who want to study locally, and meeting regional and local skills needs. It also highlighted the role that colleges will be expected to play – including the delivery of foundation degrees – as the pattern of higher education expansion is reshaped.

This emphasis on colleges' contribution to the expansion of higher education, particularly in collaboration with universities, is the latest chapter in the development of

policy in relation to higher education in further education. Part of the territory covered by Parry and Thompson's 2002 review of these policy developments is about partnerships between higher and further education. It is these developments that are the subject of the next section.

Policy development and implementation: partnerships between higher and further education

In many of the policy developments to widen participation, the role to be played by further education colleges on their own or, more frequently, working in partnership with universities was either implicitly or explicitly recognised. The development of such partnerships may be mapped against the policy developments.

The first period of expansion in higher education, from 1963 to the mid 1980s, saw "a slow expansion in [partnership] arrangements involving a small number in FHE institutions" (Bird 1996). Bird describes it as a period "where there is little discussion of such arrangements by those concerned with educational policy and with funding and quality issues".

The second period of major expansion in higher education, from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, spurred the establishment of new collaborative arrangements between higher and further education. This was the period where "partnerships come to be normal for FE and HE and to involve, for example, half the FE colleges in England" (Bird 1996). Or, according to Bocock and Scott (1995), "the growth of F/HE partnerships has been a significant feature of the past few years". The post-1992 universities became the higher education institutions most likely to be involved in partnerships with colleges, although Bocock and Scott (1995) note that many of the 'old' universities also had partnership agreements with colleges.

Parry (1996) describes the period as one in which 'establishments of higher education had looked to extend and deepen their relationships with college of further education, through franchise agreements and other forms of association'. However, the 1992 Act, in creating new and different boundaries between higher and further education, seemed to militate against the two sectors moving closer together in pursuit of increased access and participation:

. . . relationships between the two main sectors continued to be unstable and contradictory, with a number of colleges of further education experiencing difficulties in meeting their growth targets, and a number of universities looking to exercise more influence over their access hinterlands in colleges and schools . . . (Parry 1996)

The period saw the birth of the 0+3, 1+3 and 2+2 relationships between colleges and universities. In these programmes, colleges taught the foundation year, first year or first two years of a degree programme and students transferred to the partner university to complete their courses and gain an honours degree. During the same period, many universities developed Compact and Associate College arrangements with colleges that offered some preferential treatment to applicants from colleges provided they fulfilled certain criteria.

One set of developments spans most of the first and all of the second periods of expansion. This is the development of Access to Higher Education courses, delivered in colleges and designed to provide a foundation for people over the age of 21 who had left full-time education with few or no formal qualifications and who now wished to progress to higher education. The development of this work between the early 1970s and the mid 1990s is an important chapter in the history of widening participation in higher education.

It was over this short period that questions of access and participation for adults moved from the periphery to near the centre of national policy on education and training. (Parry, 1996)

Early developments are characterised by Parry as being driven by practitioners committed to opening up pathways to higher education to people who had traditionally not participated. Initiatives to widen participation in the 1970s and 1980s were 'mainly local, usually small, formally separate and often very different forms of access activity' (Parry). Some of these initiatives involved networks of colleges working with their local higher education institution. The 1987 White Paper paved the way for the creation of authorised validating agencies (AVAs) that led to the formalisation of consortia of further education colleges with at least one higher education institution.

Smith and Bocock (1999) describe the various types of franchise relationships between higher and further education that developed over the period as a response to

. . . the drive for cost-efficient expansion espoused by the funding councils and the desire of many former polytechnics to strengthen their local recruitment links with FECs as they moved towards university status in 1992 and a possibly more competitive future. (Smith and Bocock, 1999)

This so-called cost efficient expansion was driven by Government funding policies, including the fees-only funding policy of the early 1990s. The interest by the then polytechnics in forging stronger links with local further education colleges is ascribed to the incentive provided by higher tuition fees to recruit more students; the polytechnics were keen to protect what they saw as a major source of recruitment. Thus further education colleges came to be seen

. . . both as a source of student recruitment and as a location for the development of higher education courses targeted at new groups of students. Combined with HE provision already offered by colleges, these developments contributed to the blurring of boundaries between the further and higher education sectors. (ibid)

A competing view is that the period of budgetary restraint and financial consolidation in the early to mid 1990s was responsible for rupturing many emerging partnerships between higher and further education (Robertson, 1997). Collaborative arrangements in Leeds, Derby and Birmingham are cited as flourishing in an inhospitable climate while other new alliances had the potential 'to create new patterns of opportunity and progression' (ibid). The growth in collaborative ventures was seen as the 'important nexus of the next decade or more, around which many developments in a unified tertiary education system will revolve' (ibid).

The current period of expansion, from the mid 1990s onward, has seen an increase in the number of partnerships that have been formed or formalised in response to the drive to widen participation. With the increase has come a heightened awareness on the part of policy-makers of the role played by partnerships: "collaboration becomes a central concern of policy-makers, who seek, in various ways, to control it" (Bird 1996). Bird characterises the development of partnership activity between higher and further education thus:

. . . the slow and steady move from a situation in which policy is being made on the periphery – that is, in effect, in individual FHE institutions that are developing links in their own localities – to a situation in which policy-making moves to the centre. (Bird 1996)

Reflecting the greater interest being taken by policy makers in links between higher and further education, HEFCE set up a study group in 1994 to consider the relationships between institutions in the two sectors. Two years later, in 1996, HEFCE set up a working group to consider the outcomes from the study group. The consultation report from this second group "recommended that future funding of higher education in colleges should be based on collaborative arrangements with HE institutions" (Parry and Thompson 2002). HEFCE also saw such collaborative

arrangements as a means of including colleges in allocations of targeted funding for specific initiatives.

The funding of higher education in further education became an explicit driver for partnership activity between colleges and universities. The period is described as one where collaboration became the norm rather than the exception:

Whatever the degree of engagement entailed or demonstrated in practice, the need for colleges, universities and other agencies to collaborate became, in many respects, a semi-compulsory condition of HE policy and funding . . . (Parry and Thompson 2002)

With the publication of the Dearing report in 1997, the further education sector's contribution to higher education – both through the work of individual colleges and through partnerships between colleges and universities – assumed even greater prominence. Parry and Thompson (2002) describe the report as the origins of contemporary policy for higher education in colleges. Certainly Dearing had much to say about collaboration between the further and higher education sectors. The report of the inquiry urged that collaboration between universities and colleges should be especially encouraged, although some of the wording is surprisingly passive in this respect:

Lifelong learning and wider participation in higher education will foster collaboration between further and higher education institutions. (NCIHE 1997)

Parry (1998) commented that the focus in the Dearing recommendations on expansion of sub-degree provision in further education colleges was intended to strengthen collaborative and other relationships between higher and further education. However, this was balanced by relatively prescriptive recommendations that emphasised the need for adequate mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of quality and standards in franchise relationships.

On the other hand, the Dearing committee was not persuaded of the need to look at some of the structural barriers to collaboration:

A number of the responses submitted to the inquiry suggested that collaboration was hindered by the current funding arrangements and that 'the funding and assessment methodologies are seen as particular barriers to collaboration'. . . The Dearing committee acknowledged the strong weight of feeling that 'competitive pressures have gone too far in promoting a climate which is antipathetic to collaboration' but was not convinced that existing funding arrangements were at the root of the problem. (Parry and Thompson 2002)

However, it is undoubtedly the case that, following the Dearing report, the focus on collaboration between higher and further education intensified. As Parry and Thompson comment,

In the evolution of national policy the requirement for colleges to cooperate and collaborate with HE institutions, sometimes alone and sometimes with other organisations, assumed an ever-increasing significance. (Parry and Thompson 2002)

The transfer from academic year 1999-2000 of funding responsibility for higher national certificates and diplomas from FEFC to HEFCE meant that HEFCE now had direct funding relationships with many more colleges than previously. Some of the colleges delivered very small pockets of higher education. According to Parry and Thompson “HEFCE estimate that it would initially be responsible for funding . . . roughly 200 more colleges” than it had prior to the transfer. The number of colleges directly funded by HEFCE was at its peak of 270 in the year of transfer, 1999-2000, but reduced thereafter as more colleges opted for indirect funding routes.

HEFCE was keen to encourage indirect funding routes, particularly for colleges that had small volumes of higher education. The codes of practice issued in 2000 for franchise partnerships and funding consortia included strong arguments from HEFCE on the benefits of working collaboratively:

[Franchise partnerships] fulfil an important role in widening access for students. They can provide good opportunities for student progression. They offer a valuable vehicle for close collaboration between HEIs and FECs in meeting local and regional needs for coherent provision of HE. They also help to develop diversity in the sector. Where partnerships are already working well, we want to sustain them. We also want to encourage the formation of new partnerships. (HEFCE 2000f)

and

[Funding consortia] can offer advantages to students by providing a wider network of HE experience among the member institutions. They can simplify and allow flexibility in administration, and promote collaboration between HE providers in planning particularly the local and sub-regional patterns of HE. Consortia also fulfil an important role in widening access for students. They can provide good opportunities for student progression, and they help to support diversity in the sector. (ibid)

The HEFCE document that proposed the funding consortium route in 1999 identified a number of benefits of the new model. These included the premise that members of a funding consortium would be equal partners. The fact that students remain as students of individual consortium members, that consortia are responsible for making individualised student data returns and that consortia are responsible for the quality of the programmes they deliver are the operational signals of this equality. This contrasts

with the franchise partnership model where the higher education institution is clearly in the lead role in the partnership. The new model would also enable funding to be distributed between a group of higher education providers, by agreement with consortium members. In practice, however, this was already the case in franchise partnerships, although it was for the university involved to make decisions about redeploying student numbers between different franchise partners.

HEFCE held regional seminars in the first half of 2000 that were designed to “give institutions an opportunity to learn about consortia arrangements that are already well developed and to contribute to [HEFCE’s] developing thinking about the nature and operation of funding consortia” (HEFCE 2000f). In the introduction to the codes of practice document, it was made clear that some of the respondents to the initial consultation document were confused about the differences between franchise partnerships and funding consortia.

Nevertheless, there was no suggestion that the new model might be piloted and evaluated before being offered as a route to those partnerships that wished to adopt it. The articulation of the principles by which effectiveness could be judged and the respective responsibilities of institutions in the two models was aimed at clearing up the confusion (see Appendices 3 & 4). No compelling case was made for the funding consortium being a ‘better’ model of partnership than existing franchise partnership arrangements. Indeed, HEFCE was at pains not to be prescriptive as far as partnerships between higher and further education were concerned. The only regulation of the new model related to the requirement for would-be consortia to satisfy HEFCE that they satisfied the six principles of an effective funding consortium in order to be ‘recognised’.

The lack of a compelling case for the funding consortium model and the acknowledgement that the distinctions between it and the franchise partnership were not wholly transparent points to a policy initiative being introduced without benefit of sufficient evidence as to what was needed or a thorough consideration of the practical implications of the new model. The codes of practice document included a commitment to carry out a survey in 2001-02 to find out how effectively franchise and funding consortia models were working. It notes:

If the survey provides evidence of concern about the effectiveness of indirect funding partnerships or the operation of franchise or consortia agreements, we will consider at that stage what further steps would be appropriate. (HEFCE 2000f)

In fact, the review was postponed and was eventually conducted in the first half of 2003. The outcomes were published in December 2003 (HEFCE 2003c).

The 2003 White Paper represents the latest policy development that seeks to promote collaboration between higher education and further education institutions. It sets out a clear expectation that higher and further education will work together to deliver increased and widened participation, largely through the vehicle of the vocational foundation degree qualification introduced in 2000.

. . . structured partnerships between colleges and universities – franchise or consortium arrangements with colleges funded through partner HEIs – will be the primary vehicles to meet these aims and will deliver the best benefits for learners. (DfES 2003a)

and

The bulk of the expansion will come through new types of qualification, tailored to the needs of students and of the economy. Our emphasis will be on the expansion of two-year work-focused foundation degrees, as they become the primary work-focused higher education qualification. . . Foundation degrees will often be delivered in Further Education colleges, and we will build and strengthen the links between further and higher education, to give students clearer progression pathways and support the development of work-based degrees . . . (ibid)

The White Paper promises to make it easier to form partnerships between colleges and universities by removing unnecessary bureaucracy.

We believe that there are unnecessary difficulties for collaboration between higher education and further education presented by the need to respond to the two different funding council regimes in relation to planning, funding and data collection, as well as the difficulties of juggling the requirements of the two quality assurance and inspection arrangements. (ibid)

The section on collaboration ends with a commitment to review the “administrative and legislative barriers that exist to improve greater integration of systems” (ibid).

Reasons for collaboration

The institutions involved in partnerships collaborate for a variety of reasons. Access to funding is one of the main ones. For many colleges, partnership with a higher education institution offers them the only route for securing funding for their higher education provision. There is a growing trend of targeted funding only being accessible by institutions working in consortia or partnership with each other. Some of the funding incentives are linked to the objective of widening participation and these have had a significant effect on the behaviour of some institutions. However, funding is not the only reason that partnerships exist. Indeed, some argue that funding issues

are secondary, citing instead the primary goals of ‘student progression and wider access’ (Bocock and Scott 1995). Institutional mission and a sense of making a contribution to the social and economic well being of a locality or region may be powerful drivers for some institutions. Partnership offers colleges a validation route for their higher education work.

An HMI survey report (1991) of visits to polytechnics and partner colleges described the benefits of collaborative arrangements for students, colleges and polytechnics. Parry and Thompson (2002) summarise the benefits, including:

- local availability of courses and ease of progression (for students);
- increased access to higher education for local communities (for colleges); and
- extension of regional role and influence; means of achieving institutional aims to widen access (for polytechnics).

Abramson (1996) identifies the most frequently cited ‘partnership dividends’ for higher education and further education. These are grouped together in Figure 2.

| Figure 2: Frequently cited partnership dividends | |
|---|---|
| Higher education | Further education |
| Direct income generation | Direct income generation |
| Indirect income generation | Indirect income generation |
| Institutional mission to increase and widen participation | Institutional mission to serve the needs of the local community |
| Enhancement of regional status and influence | Enhanced institutional status and reputation |

Source: (Abramson 1996)

Rawlinson, Frost and Walsh (1996) identify some of the same benefits and add others. For example, for universities, recruitment to courses with low numbers of applicants and the involvement of university staff in new areas of work, together with the associated staff development were thought to be valuable aspects of the links. For colleges, too, staff development was regarded as an important aspect of the links, providing college staff with access to the university environment that they lacked.

According to Smith and Bocock (1999), there have been two competing sets of policy objectives that have impacted on the interface between higher and further education. The first was what they describe as the attempt to integrate the academic and

vocational tracks while the second focused on participation in higher education and progression from further to higher education. The outcome of the first set of policies has been a minimalist model 'designed to confine and constrain the effects of increased participation within a larger but essentially unchanged order', with the boundaries between higher and further education remaining largely intact. The model that is the outcome of the second set of policies is described as more radical where the boundaries between the sectors become increasingly irrelevant.

It is based on the concept of a single and more coherent system of post-compulsory education and training which replaces the traditional notion of the university and college. (Smith and Bocock, 1999)

Marks (2002) takes the 'seamless web' analogy for the developing relations between higher and further education, arguing in support of a model that has all local further and higher education institutions working together 'under a single institutional label without giving a pre-eminence to three year degree courses at the expense of other branches of post-compulsory learning'. His argument neglects the differential levels of power held by the respective institutions and the competition in which they are engaged for students. He does, however, cite King (1995) when she calls for regional cooperation between higher and further education and an erosion of hierarchy between the two sectors as a means of avoiding destructive competition. King is the vice chancellor of Staffordshire University, the lead institution in case study two, SURF.

In highlighting the desirability of greater collaboration and further blurring of the boundaries between higher and further education, both sets of commentators appear to overlook the fact that these activities are still largely the domain of the newer universities. In the battle for survival, the various forms of collaboration aimed at widening participation may be seen as a response to a changing market. With the expansion of student places, 'traditional' 18/19 year old applicants with A levels have a greater choice of institutions, including those that are perceived to be more prestigious. Targeting students in 'widening participation' categories offers scope for growth to newer universities, with or without further education college partners. Scott (2003), Stuart (2002) and Layer (2003) have all commented on the prevailing pattern of participation in higher education which has resisted repeated attempts to broaden the social or class base of participants.

However, claims that under-representation amongst such groups [women and ethnic minority students] have been 'solved' are to some extent misleading. Women remain under-represented in certain disciplinary areas . . . and certain ethnic minority groups remain under-represented in proportion to their presence in the population as a whole. More intractable still, has been the problem of increasing participation by young students from poor backgrounds. (Smith and Bocock, 1999)

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY 1, HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

The Higher Education and Training Partnership (HETP) was the first of four case studies conducted for the research into the contribution of higher and further education partnerships to Government objectives for widening participation in higher education. The case study needs to be prefaced with a note about developments during the course of the research. An interim report on the HETP case study triggered discussions among HETP members about the future of the partnership. These led ultimately to a decision by the Executive of the HETP to dissolve the HETP and replace it with a larger and more inclusive consortium embracing Middlesex University, all the LSC-funded colleges in the London North LSC area, and Harlow College. These developments are reported in the latter part of the case study. As the new consortium came into being on 1 August 2003, HETP as an entity is discussed in the past tense.

Membership and form of partnership

HETP existed between 1998 and 2003 as a funding consortium involving Middlesex University as the lead institution with four further education colleges. Table 4 lists the members of HETP. Four of the five partners are located in north London, in the geographical area that matches the administrative boundary of the London North LSC. The remaining partner is located in west Essex, in the area served by the Essex LSC. In addition to straddling two local LSC areas, HETP crossed the regional boundaries between the London and Eastern regions and was active in at least five local education authority areas. The Lee Valley regeneration corridor formed a link between HETP partners in north London and Essex.

| Table 4: Members of the Higher Education and Training Partnership | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Barnet College | The College of North East London |
| Harlow College | Waltham Forest College |
| Middlesex University (lead institution) | |

Source: Middlesex University

HETP was one of the first four HEFCE-recognised funding consortia (see page 21 for a discussion of the funding consortium model).

Background and history of the partnership

HETP was established in 1998. It grew out of fruitful collaborative arrangements between Middlesex University and the four colleges. Before the establishment of HETP, all four colleges were Associate Colleges of Middlesex University. Barnet College merged with Hendon College in 2002. The former Hendon College was an Associate College of the University but not a member of HETP. All four HETP colleges were involved in delivering higher education, some funded directly by HEFCE, some via Middlesex University and some funded by the FEFC. When HEFCE announced the new option of the funding consortium in 1999, HETP sought and received recognition to become one of the first four funding consortia in 2000.

HETP did not represent the University's only links to local colleges in the period from 1998-2003. Middlesex University had strong links with all its north London college neighbours. Those colleges were all either Associate Colleges or, more recently, Associate Sixth Form Colleges of the University. Three of them, in the London Borough of Enfield, received either direct funding from HEFCE or indirect HEFCE funding via the University for their higher education programmes, under franchise partnership arrangements. Two of the three Enfield colleges would have preferred to be members of HETP from the outset. However, a decision was taken to keep HETP small until it had been successfully established.

The development of Associate College links between Middlesex University and a number of colleges and other institutes was the subject of a Masters dissertation by Ford in 1997 that precipitated discussions that led to the creation of HETP.

Purpose of the partnership

In creating HETP, the five partners envisaged it as a federal provider of seamless further and higher education opportunities. HETP's mission was to:

provide high-quality, accessible, innovative, relevant and cost-effective lifelong education and training opportunities and, thereby, to contribute significantly to the economic, social and cultural well being and success of the communities it serves.

HETP's aims are set out in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Aims of the Higher Education and Training Partnership

Main aims (all parties)

- 1 To develop a strategic collaborative approach to training and education provision within the region to support social and regional economic regeneration.
- 2 To plan and provide collaboratively for increased part-time higher education opportunities jointly delivered to local communities.
- 3 To develop institutional strategic plans in partnership so that major investment decisions are rational and coherent at a regional and sub-regional level.
- 4 To review current non-core activities with a view to developing joint, mutually beneficial corporate service agreements.
- 5 To develop and provide staff development programmes associated with joint management and corporation development.
- 6 To strategically plan and bid in partnership for funding through Government, Funding Council and other regional and national initiatives.

Main aims (Barnet College, The College of North East London and Waltham Forest College)

- 7 To map existing and planned curriculum provision with a view to developing and implementing explicit referral systems between each of the partner colleges.
- 8 To develop training events for staff in response to issues such as self-inspection, use of telematics.
- 9 To respond to opportunities relating to the regeneration of the Lee Valley.

Source: HETP Partnership Agreement

How the partnership operated

Direction and management of the partnership

The partnership was steered by the HETP Executive. Members of the Executive comprised the Principals of the four further education colleges, the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor of Middlesex University. The Director of the HETP (the post occupied by the researcher from May 2001 to April 2003) acted as officer to meetings of the Executive. The Executive met monthly for the first four years of HETP but moved in 2002 to a bi-monthly meeting pattern.

Partnership infrastructure

The Executive set up a secretariat to be responsible for the day to day management of the partnership. The secretariat comprised the HETP Director, supported by a Personal Assistant. The secretariat was based at one of the University's campuses. The costs of the secretariat were shared by the partner colleges in proportion to the volume of their higher education activity, with a matching contribution from the University. The secretariat was responsible for arranging and clerking all HETP meetings. The HETP Director chaired a monthly Management Group meeting. The Management Group comprised the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor and the higher education co-ordinators in the partner colleges.

Following a joint staff development day in March 2001 attended by over 100 colleagues from the five partner institutions, it was agreed to establish a number of networking groups to enable colleagues working in similar areas in the five institutions to share and take forward issues of common interest. Networking groups were set up in eight areas:

- quality assurance, enhancement and standards;
- marketing;
- learning and teaching;
- foundation degree co-ordination;
- student financial support and support services;
- joint income generation and enterprise initiatives;
- human resources and staff development; and
- estates and facilities.

Of these, the marketing group was the most active group, producing a regular newsletter, a leaflet for employers and a joint course guide. The quality assurance group met regularly and discussed the development of a quality assurance framework for use in the colleges that recognised the requirements of the different agencies with an interest in quality in further education colleges. The student financial support and support services group met regularly to discuss issues related to the collection of data about colleges' higher education students and the arrangements for administering the consortium's hardship fund allocations on behalf of all member institutions. The joint income generation and enterprise initiatives group was the driving force in developing a successful application for a Centre of Vocational Excellence in health and social care, led by Barnet College and supported by The College of North East London and

Middlesex University. The human resources and staff development group acted as a forum for discussing issues of common interest while steering away from potentially difficult areas such as any attempt to harmonise staff conditions of service across the partnership.

Other networking groups were not as active. Although HETP benefited from an allocation from HEFCE to develop learning and teaching of higher education in the partner colleges, the learning and teaching group did not have a strategic role in shared activities to improve learning and teaching. Activity under this heading was largely focused on the development of new programmes rather than seeking to improve learning and teaching on existing programmes. The foundation degree co-ordination group was largely a forum for practitioners of existing and planned foundation degrees to share issues and practice. The estates and facilities group never succeeded in attracting more than two representatives to a meeting at any time. There was no enthusiasm for collaborative consideration of the ways in which resources and facilities could be shared or the potential leverage of HETP as a purchasing consortium.

Information about the networking groups, key contacts for activities and functions in the partner institutions and basic information about quality, data and financial procedures relating to the partnership were brought together for the first time in 2001 in an HETP staff handbook.

Partnership agreement

In addition to the mission and aims of the partnership, the HETP partnership agreement, signed by the heads of the five members of the consortium, covered a number of important areas. The various functions fulfilled by the University and the college partners were set out in some detail in the agreement. The areas are captured in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Areas covered by the HETP partnership agreement

- Aims and objectives of the Partnership
- Expectations and obligations of partnership members
- Partnership secretariat and office
- Programme planning, quality assurance and academic standards
- Determination of the responsibilities for the aspects of the partnership's work, including the following functions:
 - Registrarial (academic registry and other services)
 - Planning and development
 - Financial
 - Quality assurance and audit
 - Communications
 - Human resources
 - Computing, information and learning resource
 - Estates and facilities
- Planning and funding arrangements
- Student and staff access to facilities
- Student progression
- Staff interaction and development
- Effectiveness of the agreement

Source: HETP Partnership Agreement

Financial agreement

The financial arrangements were spelt out in the partnership agreement. Colleges received the income for the higher education students they taught according to a formula that included the tuition fee income for HETP programmes.

The University deducted a flat rate topslice for each full-time equivalent student in respect of the services it provided to college partners. The figure was unchanged from the establishment of the partnership in 1998 until the start of the academic year 2002-03 when it was increased by 5%. HETP commissioned external consultants to complete a survey of costs in 2002-03, using an allocation from HEFCE's Restructuring and Collaboration Fund. The review indicated the difficulties of comparing costs in higher education with costs in further education colleges. It also concluded that the flat rate topslice was not sufficient to cover the University's costs of the various functions it fulfilled in relation to the partnership. The outcomes of the review were shared with the

HETP Executive in early 2003 and informed decisions about the future rate of the topslice to reflect the costs of the services provided by the University.

Colleges were paid three times a year under the terms of the agreement:

- First payment in September based on target student numbers;
- Second payment in January based on actual enrolments in Semester 1 and projected additional enrolments in Semester 2; and
- Third payment in May based on actual numbers on programmes.

Data collection

HETP colleagues stressed the difficulties there had been in the data collection and verification process on which the calculation of payments to colleges was based. The University carried out a verification exercise each semester on student numbers being delivered by the colleges. Colleges found that the information they had recorded about their higher education students did not always agree with that held by the University. Even though there were systems in place for the colleges to send the University copies of student enrolment forms and class lists of higher education students, there were frequent discrepancies in the information held by the University and partner colleges. The University and the colleges used different systems and software for recording student records, making the transfer of data a cumbersome one involving the downloading of information to Excel spreadsheets at one end and re-entering into a different format at the other. The timing of requests by the University for the information it needed to make aggregate student number returns to HEFCE frequently clashed with colleges' timetables for making individualised student data returns to the LSC. The latter was seen by colleges as the priority activity as it accounted for the majority of their work.

The requirement under the HEFCE code of practice for each member of the consortium to make its own individualised student returns to HESA (the University) or LSC (the colleges) was seen by both college and University staff as an additional burden. All staff concerned with data collection favoured the option of the University taking a lead in making all data returns on the colleges' behalf even though this was not in line with HEFCE's code of practice for funding consortia.

Quality assurance

HEFCE's code of practice for funding consortia says that "each consortium member is directly responsible for the quality of the learning opportunities of its HE programmes". HETP deliberately adopted a variation to this approach towards the quality assurance of programmes delivered in the name of Middlesex University. For all programmes leading to an award of the University, or an Edexcel award validated under licence by the University, the ultimate responsibility for quality assurance rested with the University's Quality Assurance and Audit Service (QAAS). QAAS published a comprehensive procedures manual that covered all aspects of programme planning, development, validation, quality assurance and monitoring. Link tutors from the relevant School within the University were appointed to be the main point of contact with the programme leader, or institutional link tutor, based in the partner college.

The position was different for colleges' own higher education programmes that had been directly validated by Edexcel. With these, responsibility for quality assurance rested with the partner college on the basis that the University had no input to the curriculum or quality assurance requirements of the programme. However, in the event that one of these programmes was selected for review by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the University would offer support to the college(s) in preparing for and undergoing the review.

One issue that emerged strongly from interviews with colleagues in partner colleges was their lack of knowledge or understanding about the quality assurance procedures used in higher education. Their own institutions' quality assurance focus was on meeting the requirements of the common inspection framework of OFSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate and also Edexcel's quality assurance requirements. Although Middlesex University had well documented procedures, they were not widely known about or understood in colleges.

Several college colleagues commented on the desirability of the University asserting its authority as the senior partner in the area of quality assurance. Even though the code of practice is predicated on the equality of partners in this respect, colleges were happy to acknowledge that the University should take the lead. The University has the greatest experience of dealing with the QAA and risks its 'brand' in the event of the quality of provision in a partner college being deemed unsatisfactory.

Programme planning, development and delivery

There was no overarching framework for joint programme planning in HETP. Each college approached the University when it had an idea for a new programme it wished to develop and discussions took place on a bilateral basis.

However, members of HETP had previously undertaken significant joint work in developing the curriculum. Before the launch by DfES of the new foundation degrees in 2000, Middlesex University and partner colleges did substantial work to develop a new, American style associate degree. This was to have been a two-year programme delivered mainly in the colleges and leading to the award of an associate degree of the University. The option would exist for students to transfer to the University for a third, or top-up, year for the award of an honours degree. This development was cited as an example of good practice by the Secretary of State for Education in a speech at the University of Greenwich in 1999. HETP colleagues commented that the associate degree development work represented a model of collaborative curriculum development that they valued highly.

However, the work was overtaken by the introduction of foundation degrees. HETP was unsuccessful in its bid for funding to develop one or more prototype foundation degrees, apparently on the basis that the development work already carried out for the associate degree would be readily transferable to the foundation degree. Despite not receiving additional funding to support their development, colleagues from three of the partner colleges worked with University colleagues to develop five foundation degrees. One of them, in Housing Studies, proved to be a particularly successful model of collaboration with employers and the appropriate professional body to produce a course that was relevant to the needs of students and their employers. The Housing Studies foundation degree programme received an outstanding report in the QAA's 2003 review of a sample of around 30 foundation degrees.

HETP was also responsible for establishing the Open Learning Partnership (OLP), initially as the vehicle to bid for funding to become the Ufl/learndirect hub for North London. OLP became a successful organisation in its own right. Its board was originally made up of representatives of the five HETP institutions. Its work in online learning was essentially on behalf of members of HETP. OLP's learner numbers continue to increase, but these are still largely at FE levels 1 and 2 (eg NVQ1 and 2 or GNVQ Foundation and Intermediate) and there is, as yet, no link through to higher education work. In recognition of the lack of progression from OLP to higher

education, the University withdrew from the partnership and will in future have a joint initiatives agreement with the OLP. The OLP is restructuring to include all the colleges and other relevant providers in the London North LSC area in its membership.

Some college staff regretted that not more had been achieved in the area of shared curriculum development. The Principal of one college referred to the development of HETP-branded products as being potentially one of the main aspects of value added of the partnership. Recently six colleges joined the University in developing and running at the University a joint BA (Hons) and foundation degree in Early Childhood Studies that secured Sure Start support. It recruited well over target and demonstrates what can be achieved through collaboration, as opposed to individual college/University developments.

Access to facilities of the University

The HETP partnership agreement provided for students and staff in partner colleges to access University facilities. The agreement extended to students on programmes leading to University awards and those leading to awards directly validated by Edexcel. The facilities included library and computing facilities, membership of the University's student union, sports facilities and student support facilities. In practice, this aspect of the partnership agreement was little exploited, students preferring to access the facilities offered by the college where they were pursuing their programmes. There were notable exceptions, including the use by Barnet College's higher education students of the art library on one of the University campuses. While staff in partner institutions agreed to share information about staff development activities, there were limited instances of staff attending events outside their own institution.

Marketing of colleges' higher education provision

Information about HETP programmes was included in the University's undergraduate and post-graduate prospectuses. In the colleges' prospectuses, the importance of the relationship with Middlesex University was highlighted. The HETP marketing group produced a joint course guide that provided information about all partner colleges' higher education opportunities in one publication and was responsible for an HETP newsletter three times a year that was distributed to staff in the partner institutions. The marketing group also produced a leaflet for employers about the work of HETP. The marketing group was also responsible for organising a series of communication

days targeted at frontline staff in the five partner institutions to raise their awareness and understanding of HETP and the activities of member institutions.

The partnership's contribution to widening participation

Range of provision

The provision offered by the college members of the consortium covered a broad spectrum. It ranged from automotive engineering to urban regeneration, with the majority of students to be found on art and design, business and management, or computing programmes. The provision had generally developed in areas that offered progression from colleges' vocational further education provision. It also reflected the staff expertise and resources available in partner colleges.

Student numbers

The first year that funding for all the consortium's work was channelled through the University was 2000-01, which was also the first year for the new funding consortium arrangement. In the first year of HETP as a funding consortium, there were a total of 1005 full-time equivalent students on higher education programmes in the partner colleges. These numbers were in effect the HETP baseline student numbers. The numbers derived from the total number of higher education student places available in the partner colleges in 1999-2000, funded either directly by HEFCE or indirectly via the University.

The total number of students pursuing higher education opportunities in HETP colleges rose in each successive year from 1999-2000 to 2001-02, with a further rise projected for 2002-03. On the basis that the students included in these numbers may be regarded as progressing from further to higher education, this was a positive outcome.

However, in terms of the extent to which HETP succeeded in widening participation in higher education, it is hard to determine the full picture. The University carries out a range of analyses of its student cohort, according to age, gender, ethnicity, disability, postcode and so on. However, there was no similar breakdown analysis of HETP students to identify whether they represented 'more of the same' or were drawn from categories of people who are under-represented in higher education. It is likely that a large proportion of the students who choose to pursue their higher education in

colleges will come from those categories but without the analysis it is not possible to be certain.

Table 5 shows how many students were following higher education courses at the HETP partner colleges in 1999-2000 to 2001-02 and the growth in the three-year period.

The colleges have ambitious plans for growth in the next three years, responding to the Government’s call to achieve the target of 50% of young people participating in higher education by 2010. This is despite the fact that only one of the colleges consistently met its targets in the previous three years.

| Table 5: HETP’s contribution to widening participation – numbers of full-time equivalent students | | | |
|---|-----------|---------|---------|
| | 1999-2000 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 |
| Numbers of FTE students following higher education programmes in partner colleges | 962 | 1005 | 1089 |
| Growth in FTE students | - | 45 | 84 |
| Percentage growth | - | 5% | 8% |

Source: Middlesex University

Perceptions of the benefits of the partnership

From the University’s point of view, the formation of HETP served to signal to the wider world its commitment to being a democratic and inclusive institution. It confirmed the University as an institution with a clear focus on the region in which it was located and one that was committed to widening participation. The University’s view was that HETP was about building the supply chain of students progressing from colleges’ further and higher education provision to higher level programmes delivered by Middlesex or partner colleges. There were expectations of students transferring to the University to top up their qualifications to honours degree once they had completed their sub-degree qualification in one of the partner colleges. Further, because of the growing links between partner colleges and the University, it was expected that students who had

completed their FE Level 3 qualifications would increasingly be encouraged to consider Middlesex as their first choice, local university.

The view from the colleges was broadly that HETP was, first and foremost, a means of funding and expanding their higher education provision while at the same time offering to their students a wide range of progression opportunities. For the three partner colleges located in north London, the reference in the mission statement to 'economic and social well-being and success' was significant. A key driver for those colleges was the view that a sound partnership with the University would create a ready vehicle through which to bid for funding from a range of different sources, all of which demanded evidence of partnership (see aims 6 & 9). In practice, this aim was never realised.

A practical benefit of the partnership that colleges appreciated was the opportunity for staff to enrol on a University programme and receive a discount of 50% on the fees. Staff from all partner colleges took advantage of the benefit.

Colleagues in Middlesex University and partner colleges believe that HETP succeeded in creating a vehicle for working together across a range of activities. They recognised that partnerships and collaboration are difficult and time-consuming to develop and sustain. One college Principal commented: "HETP withstood some difficult issues and discussions in the last two years. This should be seen as a testament to the work that has gone into developing a spirit of openness and willingness to challenge."

Relationships between partners

The colleges were generally positive about their relationships with the University. They acknowledge the commitment and support of the Deputy Vice Chancellor in the development and maintenance of the partnership. However, some representatives commented on the differential levels of support from colleagues in the schools of the University. Some college representatives believed that University colleagues did not value colleges' contribution to the delivery of higher education. The view expressed by more than one college colleague was that higher education delivered in further education should be seen as a different but equal product. Moreover, the strengths of further education should be valued where they are translated into a greater level of learner support for predominantly non-traditional students.

Some University colleagues were not clear about the benefits of the links with colleges. The links with colleges were demanding of time as college staff were used to operating within a different quality assurance framework and required support or guidance in meeting the requirements of the higher education system for quality assurance. Some University staff saw the links as additional work on which the returns were not clear.

One of the key themes to emerge from interviews with colleagues in partner colleges was the long-standing issue of cultural difference between further and higher education that the existence of HETP had hardly begun to challenge. At the heart of this issue were the differences in conditions of service and approach to teaching further and higher education students. College representatives commented that the different contracts in further education meant that they had limited time to engage in research or scholarly activities.

Impact of the research on the future development of HETP

Review of HETP

The University refocused its mission in 2002. In September 2002, the Vice Chancellor issued a discussion paper, *Middlesex University: the next ten years*. Following a period of consultation, it decided to move forward with a model that seeks to balance excellence in teaching, excellence in research, strong links with business and a strong performance in overseas markets. Maintaining strong relationships with partner further education colleges was a key element of the model.

At the same time as discussions about the future of the University were taking place, new Principals took up post at two of the HETP colleges. The previous Principals of those colleges had been strong driving forces for the creation and maintenance of HETP. A third HETP college had had a change of Principal in 2001.

Alongside these events, interviews with University and college representatives of HETP were being conducted for this research. The interim report that summarised the emerging findings from the research was a major factor in initiating a review of HETP.

Messages from case study interviews

Colleagues acknowledged that the partnership between the University and the colleges provided a potential vehicle for widening participation in higher education. They saw

the partnership being, for the most part, characterised by trust in other partners. A number of developments were cited as positive outcomes of the partnership to date. However, some negative messages also emerged. These related to the perceived lack of increase in student progression as a result of the partnership, failure to develop more joint curriculum products and issues around data collection and quality assurance. In short, members were questioning the value being added by HETP.

All interviewees agreed that there should be clarity of purpose in four key areas. HETP should be:

- a means of promoting widening participation and progression to higher education;
- a channel of funding for colleges' higher education provision;
- a vehicle for shared curriculum/product development, including in such areas as virtual learning environments; and
- a means of assuring the quality of higher education provision in partner colleges.

Discussions with University Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor

As part of the research, meetings took place in October 2002 with the University's Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor. The Vice Chancellor expressed the view that HETP was not delivering the additional things it was set up to do. It had become more of a forum for exchanging ideas than getting things done. A further issue was that very few people both within the institutions involved and outside knew what HETP was about. For the partnership to work, it needed to demonstrate core mutual benefit to all parties.

The review of the University's mission referred to above and the arrival of new Principals offered a unique opportunity to take stock of the partnership. The Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor requested that a fundamental review of the existing partnership should be initiated with the HETP executive in early 2003.

Interim report on findings

Following those discussions, the researcher produced a draft interim report that was discussed by the University's Executive. The key points in the interim report were discussed by the HETP Executive at a meeting in January 2003. The Executive agreed in principle to dissolve HETP and to create a more inclusive partnership that would embrace all the further education and sixth form colleges in the London North

LSC area. Harlow College would continue to be a member. The report was amended to reflect the discussion at the meeting and issued as a consultation document in February 2003. Executive members resolved to discuss the consultation document with their management teams prior to the next meeting of the Executive.

At the next meeting, in March 2003, feedback was received from all members. The in-principle decision to dissolve HETP was unanimously endorsed, as was the decision to set up a new and wider body. In the meantime, soundings had also been taken with potential members of the proposed new and wider partnership. All had responded positively. The Deputy Vice Chancellor undertook to produce a draft partnership agreement for the next meeting to take place in May 2003. Members of the HETP Management Group were invited to attend the meeting. The researcher provided extensive comments on the draft new partnership agreement before it was issued.

The meeting in May 2003 and a further meeting in June 2003 discussed the draft partnership agreement and reached agreement on it. Although the researcher had by that time left HETP to take up a new post elsewhere, she attended the meetings and contributed to discussions. It was agreed that the new partnership would be called the Middlesex University Higher and Further Education Consortium. The Consortium would be established for the beginning of the new academic year on 1 August 2003. Its members would include Middlesex University and 10 colleges, including six further education colleges, three sixth form colleges and one college for land-based industries. Unlike HETP, the new body would not have a separate mission statement nor be marketed as a separate entity.

Pending the outcomes of HEFCE's review of indirect funding arrangements, the decision was deferred as to whether the new partnership would be formed as a funding consortium or as a series of bilateral franchise partnerships between the University and each college.

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY 2, STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY REGIONAL FEDERATION

Membership and form of partnership

The Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF) is a funding consortium comprising Staffordshire University and 11 college partners. Nine of the colleges are in Staffordshire and the remaining two are in Shropshire. A complete listing of the membership of SURF is provided in Table 6 below. SURF crosses several administrative boundaries. It is wholly located in the West Midlands region in terms of the regional boundaries for HEFCE and Advantage West Midlands, the Regional Development Agency. It straddles the local LSC and local education authority areas of Staffordshire and Shropshire.

| Table 6: Members of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation | |
|--|---|
| Burton College | Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology |
| Cannock Chase Technical College | Stafford College |
| City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College | Staffordshire University (lead institution) |
| Leek College of Further Education and School of Art | Stoke-on-Trent College |
| Newcastle-under-Lyme College | Tamworth and Lichfield College |
| Rodbaston College | Walford and North Shropshire College |

Source: Staffordshire University

SURF was one of the first four HEFCE-recognised funding consortia (see page 21 for a discussion of the funding consortium model).

Background and history of the partnership

The colleges in Staffordshire have a long history of working closely with each other. In the mid 1990s, they formed the Staffordshire Association of Colleges that formalised the relationship. By mutual agreement, the heads of the colleges divided the county up into district boundaries and agreed not to work outside those boundaries. With one exception, the colleges adhered to the agreement. The issue of the college that chose not to operate according to the agreement was eventually resolved when the Principal left the college. In addition to the agreement about geographical boundaries, some of

the Staffordshire colleges had, to some extent, segmented the market according to their respective specialisms.

In the late 1990s, the Staffordshire Association of Colleges established a bidding unit for European and Jobcentre Plus funding for their further education work. Many of the colleges were already working with Staffordshire University for their higher education provision. There was a well-established Associate College network of Staffordshire University dating from the early 1990s. The HEFCE-recognised funding consortium grew from those joint activities.

The University's Deputy Vice Chancellor played a key role in driving developments forward. Staffordshire University was at that time looking for a coherent way of managing and rationalising its franchise work with colleges. The Vice Chancellor had already identified the University as an institution with a clear regional focus. In that context, the decision to seek funding consortium status seemed to be an obvious way forward. Once the consortium had been recognised by HEFCE, the Deputy Vice Chancellor set about establishing the centrality of SURF across the University. It was to be integral to the University's activities, including strategic planning, and not a peripheral activity.

The Staffordshire Association of Colleges decided that they all wanted to be members of SURF. The University also had strong links with two Shropshire colleges, Walford and North Shropshire College and Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology. They too were invited to become members of SURF.

Purpose of the partnership

Staffordshire University sees itself as a regional institution that excels in teaching. Its partnerships with colleges are the key vehicle for delivering its regional mission and for widening participation. The University's Vice Chancellor is a passionate advocate for the collaborative agenda between higher and further education. She describes SURF as a transformational model of higher and further education working together to deliver the widest possible range of educational opportunities to people in the area served by the consortium. SURF's aim is:

To plan and provide quality assured higher education to widen participation and facilitate progression for people in Staffordshire and Shropshire.

To achieve the aim, eight objectives were agreed. They are set out in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Objectives of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation

1. To extend participation in higher education.
2. To develop higher education provision that is accessible and socially inclusive, based on student demand and skills shortages.
3. To establish learning pathways between further and higher education within the national qualifications framework.
4. To develop staff through the dissemination of good practice in curriculum design, learning and teaching, quality assurance, student support and the administration of provision.
5. To maximise the learning and teaching potential of the broadband network linking members of SURF in Staffordshire and to secure its extension to Shropshire.
6. To work together to provide high quality support for students within the constraints of the available resources.
7. To work together to maximise funding opportunities for widening participation in higher education.
8. To share SURF's experience of collaborative working within the wider educational community.

Source: SURF Agreement

According to one of the college representatives, the financial aspects of the consortium were not the strongest driver for collaborating with the University. The colleges' decision to be part of the consortium was much more about the wider benefits of collaboration and partnership. She cited the example of Stoke-on-Trent College that used previously to offer a range of degree programmes validated through other universities. When the college joined SURF, those programmes were discontinued because of the exclusive relationship with Staffordshire University. Financially that was disadvantageous to the college as it stopped running many higher education programmes that had been directly funded by HEFCE. The view that SURF was about more than funding was echoed by one of the SURF Principals. He said that the consortium ties colleges in with the University for all sorts of developments. He described SURF as totally integrated into the fabric of the University and colleges, saying, "It would be very hard to unpick."

How the partnership operates

Direction and management of the partnership

The Management Board of SURF meets three times a year. It comprises the Principals of all SURF colleges and two representatives from Staffordshire University,

including the Vice Chancellor who chairs it. One of the college Principals chairs the SURF Management Committee that is scheduled to meet at least three times a year but in practice meets four or five times.

Partnership infrastructure

The University provides administrative support for the Management Board, Management Committee and other SURF committees. The two main committees are the Quality Committee and the Curriculum Development Committee. There are five other SURF-wide groups dealing with other issues of common interest. There is a SURF office that comprises the University's Director of Widening Participation and two assistants. These staff are employed by Staffordshire University. Their salary costs are met out of the topslice charged by the University for the services it provides to partner colleges. The Director and the SURF office are completely integrated into the University's structures.

Partnership agreement

Staffordshire University and its partner colleges produced their partnership agreement in May 2000. The agreement was first revised in summer 2002 and was subject to a second revision in autumn 2002. The partnership agreement is agreed by the corporations of all partner colleges and the University's Academic Board. The initial agreement was due to run for a period of five years in the first instance. A commitment to review the agreement after 18 months and subsequently every three years is included in the agreement.

The main core of the partnership agreement is consistent across the whole consortium. The areas covered by the partnership agreement are set out in Figure 6. The agreement imposes a restriction on college partners that they will not enter into partnership with other higher education institutions, unless by agreement with Staffordshire University. This is in line with HEFCE's code of practice for funding consortia. The partnership imposes no restriction on the movement of student numbers between colleges. In addition, the University can choose to put more student numbers into the consortium 'pot' if it seems likely that the college(s) will be able to recruit sufficient or additional numbers to fulfil the consortium's overall funding agreement with HEFCE.

Figure 6: Areas covered by the SURF partnership agreement

- Membership
- Aim
- Objectives
- Terms of agreement
- Responsibilities and expectations of members:
 - student numbers
 - student recruitment, enrolment and admissions
 - financial arrangements
 - complaints and appeals
 - staff recruitment and development
 - student support
- Quality assurance

Source: SURF Agreement

There are also agreements between the University and individual colleges for additional services and facilities that are outside the core contract. The additional elements of the partnership agreement vary from college partner to college partner. For example, some of the SURF colleges are developing an agreement to offer provision for overseas students. Further, the University has differential relationships with its partners in the context of work with employers.

Financial agreement

The financial aspect of the partnership agreement is that the University retains a percentage of the income from HEFCE for the programmes delivered by the colleges. The colleges receive the balance of the HEFCE funding. In addition the University collects the tuition fee income for SURF programmes and distributes it to the colleges against an agreed formula.

The partnership agreement specifies monthly payments to colleges for their higher education work. Once student number targets for the academic year are agreed, colleges are paid monthly between September and December against a funding profile calculated from the target numbers. Between January and July, colleges' monthly payments are calculated on the basis of the actual numbers of students enrolled on their higher education programmes on 1 December. Where colleges offer a Semester 2 start date for their programmes, they receive payment for any January enrolments in the following year.

Data collection

SURF has streamlined the systems for collecting data from partner colleges, using a common SURF enrolment form, and making payments to colleges for the higher education work they deliver. The University's registry deals with data; students enrolling on SURF programmes are enrolled as Staffordshire University students and not as college students. The University makes data returns to HEFCE and HESA on behalf of the consortium. While this arrangement is not in line with HEFCE's code of practice for funding consortia, the system works well for the colleges who are happy not to have to deal with student returns for their higher education programmes. College representatives described the data collection process as "fantastic" and "very slick" with the ability to give student enrolment and fee collection information quickly.

Quality assurance

There is a SURF Quality Committee. The committee comprises the University's Director of Widening Participation, the University's Director of Academic Collaboration, the quality managers of each college and a representative link tutor from each University school involved in collaborative provision. The University's Quality Improvement Service provides the administrative support for the committee. The SURF Quality Committee has a dual reporting line. It reports to the SURF Management Committee and to the University's Quality Development Committee that reports in turn to the University's Academic Board. The University has the ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of programmes leading to an award of the University. In line with the HEFCE code of practice, each partner college is responsible for the quality of the teaching on individual programmes but the University has the role of supporting colleges.

The Quality Committee takes an overview of all higher education programmes delivered by SURF colleges and has a collective responsibility for quality, including in relation to failing provision. Where necessary, a rescue or action plan decision is taken by SURF collectively. A SURF Procedures Handbook sets out quality procedures and common practice. The Quality Committee is working on the implementation of a common quality assurance framework. SURF colleges are very positive about the common framework.

Quality assurance at programme level is operated through a system of University link tutors liaising with their opposite numbers in the colleges. University link tutors are

generally committed but it is acknowledged that there is variable performance by link tutors. For example, there have been some problems in developing ownership of course materials and virtual learning environment developments.

As regards higher education provision in SURF colleges that is directly validated by Edexcel, there is potential in the SURF agreement for this to become University-validated provision under licence. The quality assurance framework applies to University-validated programmes and programmes directly validated by Edexcel.

The Quality Committee oversees the programme of staff development relating to quality issues for SURF colleges. The University's Director of Academic Collaboration leads on programmes of quality-related staff development for SURF. Some of the activities are funded from the administrative topslice retained by the University. Advantage West Midlands provided around £50,000 to support foundation degree development. SURF colleges also received funding from HEFCE's Teaching and Learning Development Fund and a share of the University's allocation under HEFCE's Rewarding and Developing Staff Fund. All the above funds are pooled and held centrally by the University on behalf of the consortium. The pooled funds are dealt with in a transparent way. SURF college Principals are alert to the cost and benefits of SURF in this context.

One of the requirements of college staff is support for course development. The focus of SURF staff development activities tends to be on teaching and learning and assessment, core activities to enhance the student experience. Representatives of SURF colleges said they were happy with the service provided by Staffordshire University in respect of quality assurance. They regard it as value for money.

Programme planning, development and delivery

There is a SURF Curriculum Development Group that comprises University and college representatives. The Group has a role in determining which foundation degrees should be developed as SURF products. Six of the SURF colleges are working with the University to deliver the jointly developed foundation degree in Project Management. The choice of this non-traditional area was deliberate in an attempt to create a new market for a new type of qualification. The first year was successful in terms of student recruitment.

It is planned to review the sub-degree offer across the consortium, especially where programmes run by the University are in competition with those in colleges. There are currently some issues about parallel sub-degree provision being offered in the University as well as in partner colleges. The University made a commitment not to offer foundation degrees but this may be reviewed in the light of the White Paper on higher education.

The University's planning timescales emerged as an issue for staff in both the University and colleges. Some college representatives described the University's committee structures as 'painfully slow' and expressed the view that colleges are used to working more quickly and responsively.

Access to facilities of the University

The partnership agreement identifies the facilities or services provided by the University under the agreement:

- Access to University library and learning resource information and electronic sources;
- Access to the University's IT facilities;
- Access to Careers information;
- Provision of financial advice and guidance via in-college sessions and electronically;
- Electronic communication and information to provide student support; and
- Management of the HEFCE Access Funds administration and returns to HEFCE.

Marketing of colleges' higher education provision

SURF programmes are marketed collectively and individually by members. A four-page leaflet summarises the range of provision available at partner colleges. There is an extensive website for SURF within the University's web pages. The SURF pages have hyperlinks to the colleges' web sites.

There are different approaches by the colleges to badging their membership of SURF and relationship to Staffordshire University. Some colleges badge their membership very visibly on their campuses while others adopt a less high profile. This may change with the plans to create SURF university centres at all of the partner colleges' campuses.

The partnership's contribution to widening participation

Range of provision

The provision offered by the college members of the consortium covers a wide range, from art and design to wildlife and countryside management. The provision has generally developed in areas that offer progression from their vocational further education provision. It also reflects the staff expertise and resources available in partner colleges.

Student numbers

Academic year 2002-03 saw the end of the first cohort of students on two-year SURF programmes. SURF's own analysis of student number data looks at the numbers enrolled, both at consortium level and individual college level. The majority of SURF students are aged between 25 and 55, ie they fall clearly into the category of adult returners rather than into the Government's 18-30 target group.

College representatives described it as difficult to know how much widening participation is being achieved. They did not believe that SURF had resulted in a significant increase in higher education student numbers in SURF colleges. The provision offered by SURF colleges largely consists of higher national certificates or higher national diplomas that existed before SURF was established. The University's own enrolments had risen but there was no suggestion that the rise had anything to do with more students coming from SURF colleges.

No progression targets are set by the University for individual colleges. Some of the colleges are setting their own targets; for example, the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College is raising its own target for progression to higher education. They recognise that the additional numbers will come mainly from the local area. This reflects the situation that there is not a strong culture of staying on into higher education in the area. A college representative described the low levels of student aspirations in Staffordshire linked to areas of high deprivation in North Staffordshire. Some students with three A levels do not apply to higher education and those who do tend to go to local universities. Students with lower grades can go straight into University but the University has not sought to push them in that direction. The issue of progression is being discussed between admissions tutors, Vice Principals and

careers staff from SURF colleges. One of the issues to be debated is the colleges' perception that the University's admissions tutors can be somewhat inflexible.

Table 7 shows how many students were following higher education courses at the SURF partner colleges between 1999-2000 and 2001-02 and the growth in the three-year period.

| Table 7: SURF's contribution to widening participation – numbers of full-time equivalent students | | | |
|---|-----------|---------|---------|
| | 1999-2000 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 |
| Numbers of FTE students following higher education programmes in partner colleges | 1084 | 1125 | 1245 |
| Growth in FTE students | - | 41 | 120 |
| Percentage growth | - | 4% | 11% |

Source: Staffordshire University

Despite the perceptions of college representatives who did not think that SURF had been responsible for growth in the number of students pursuing higher education, the table shows a significant growth in the numbers of higher education students following programmes at SURF colleges. Some of the growth may reflect the shift of funding responsibility for higher national certificates from FEFC to HEFCE so that the student numbers are now included in the count of higher education students.

Perceptions of the benefits of the partnership

Both college and University representatives in SURF commented on the added value represented by the partnership. They believed that SURF gave higher and further education a higher profile in the region. A practical benefit referred to by several interviewees was the fact that SURF has been very successful in attracting additional funding from a range of sources, all of which were only open to institutions bidding in partnership. Objective 8 in the SURF partnership agreement is about maximising funding opportunities to widen participation in higher education. An example was the allocation from a HEFCE development fund in 2001 that provided funding for a project to install servers with the virtual learning environment COSE (Creation of Study Environments) in all SURF colleges. The project has resulted in a common virtual

learning environment being implemented and made available to students in all SURF colleges. The funding was also used to design and implement a SURF website and other marketing materials. Another example was the funding for a JISC interoperability pilot for distributed teaching. A further example is a Skills for Life project funded by the Regional Development Agency. Under this project, the University hosts a Basic Skills Professional Development Centre on behalf of the consortium on its Stafford campus. The project is worth £480,000 over 2.5 years.

SURF has also been awarded a prestigious contract to run a five-year project in conjunction with Advantage West Midlands. The University of Keele is also involved in this project which is worth a total of £5 million. Its purpose is to work with employers in the region to develop a range of foundation degrees in skill areas that have been identified as a priority. Staffing for the project comprises a programme manager, four co-ordinators, a finance officer, an administrator and 20 part-time student ambassadors a year.

In addition to the additional facilities that had been made available as the result of extra funding, college representatives cited other benefits of the consortium for colleges:

- access to funding to support their higher education activities, eg from HEFCE's Rewarding and Developing Staff Fund;
- the financial cushion provided to the colleges by the University in the first year of SURF where some of the colleges did not meet their student number targets;
- access to additional student numbers from the outcomes of the Additional Student Numbers bids prepared by the University's Director of Widening Participation; and
- the drive and commitment of the Director of Widening Participation in relation to SURF and its activities.

A Vice Principal from one of the SURF colleges identified the staff development opportunities offered by the University as a major benefit of the partnership. For example, degree programmes are free for partner college colleagues. There is a reciprocal arrangement for one of the colleges to provide free secretarial training to the University's administrative staff. A quote from a college manager in a SURF promotional leaflet expresses the benefits for students of the partnership:

Our partnership with the University brings our students the best possible experience of higher education in a further education college. Through SURF, students on our HNC, HND and Foundation Degree courses enjoy all the benefits of higher education provided in an FE college. SURF gives our higher education students access to the majority of the resources and support services of a university – real benefits that ensure success and achievement.

Relationships between partners

The colleges were very positive about their relationships with the University. They were especially appreciative of the efficiency of the University's administrative procedures for SURF. Arrangements for payment work well which was an important factor for colleges.

For staff in the University who are not directly involved with the work of SURF, concerns centre on the financing of SURF. For example, there is a perception among some University staff that the percentage of HEFCE funding that is transferred to the colleges for their higher education provision may be over-generous and in need of review. In relation to the Summer Schools run by the University and SURF, there are questions as to the distribution of the funding to the colleges. These concerns about financing on the part of some University colleagues may help to explain the differential levels of support and commitment from the Schools of the University to the work of SURF. This is despite the efforts of the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor to iron out the differential responses to colleges. However, there are examples where this attitude has been reversed: one of the University Schools that was initially sceptical about working with SURF colleges is now very supportive.

There is a view from the University that, while most SURF colleges are committed to Staffordshire University, they also like to engage with other higher education institutions. However, other SURF Principals are normally robust in dealing with any suggestion that colleges may be playing universities off against each other. From the point of view of some of the colleges, the exclusivity of the arrangement presents some problems. There are a number of other universities locally and it is important to have good relationships with them all.

Colleges were concerned when the Deputy Vice Chancellor who had done much to steer the development and implementation of SURF left the University. However, they are confident that the Vice Chancellor is committed to SURF.

Future development of the partnership

In line with all other universities, Staffordshire University considered in summer and autumn 2002 how best to position itself in the context of the likely content of the forthcoming White Paper on higher education in England. As part of the process of

repositioning itself, the University's Vice Chancellor invited the heads of the SURF colleges to a dinner with the University's senior management team in September 2002 at which she gave a presentation about how the University saw itself in the future. The colleges had the opportunity to comment on the University's outline plans.

Emerging from the dialogue with colleges are plans to create SURF university centres in every partner college. One such centre already exists: the University and Tamworth and Lichfield College engaged in a unique joint venture to create the Lichfield Centre at the University's third campus. The College contributes to the delivery of Business, Law and Computing programmes at the Centre, in conjunction with the University's Business School. The success of the Centre, and of the partnership generally, has given the University and its partners the confidence to take the decision to create SURF university centres in all of the SURF colleges.

CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY 3, ANGLIA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY REGIONAL UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Membership and form of partnership

Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) has collaborative relationships with 23 colleges in East Anglia, the East Midlands and one of the north east London boroughs. Members of the partnership are listed in Table 8 below. The partnership crosses several administrative boundaries. It is represented in three HEFCE and Regional Development Agency regions: East of England, East Midlands and London. It straddles several local LSC and local education authority areas.

| Table 8: Membership of the Anglia Polytechnic University Regional University Partnership | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Anglia Polytechnic University | Huntingdonshire Regional College |
| Braintree College | Isle College |
| Cambridge Regional College | Long Road Sixth Form College |
| Chelmsford College | Lowestoft College |
| City College Norwich | Norwich School of Art and Design |
| Colchester Institute | Palmer's Sixth Form College |
| Easton College | Peterborough Regional College |
| Epping Forest College | South East Essex VI Form College |
| Great Yarmouth College | Stamford College |
| Havering College | The College of West Anglia |
| Hills Road Sixth Form College | Thurrock and Basildon College |
| Homerton College, School of Health Studies* | West Suffolk College |

* Homerton College is in the higher education sector; all other partners are in the learning and skills sector
Source: APU

The APU Regional University Partnership comprises a series of individual franchise partnerships between APU and each of its partner colleges (see page 21 for a discussion of the franchise partnership model). It is also a description of a new form of organisational structure developed by APU and its partners that brings all member institutions within a common regional framework. APU is one of the major franchisers of higher education programmes to further education colleges in the country. Of the 23 colleges in the partnership, 19 currently deliver franchised higher education provision.

Background and history of the partnership

APU's partnerships with the colleges in its region were part of a strategy developed by a previous Vice Chancellor to widen participation in higher education and pursue a regional agenda years ahead of those issues being more widely promulgated as Government policy. The development of relationships with partner colleges can be traced back to the late 1980s. The Chelmer Institute, based in Chelmsford, became the Essex Institute and merged with the Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology, based in Cambridge, to form the Anglia College of Higher Education. Following the merger of these two institutions that were some 60 miles apart, the Vice Chancellor sought to establish a stronger regional base by forming links with four of the colleges in East Anglia that were already directly funded for their higher education provision. These were City College Norwich, Norwich School of Art and Design, Colchester Institute and Writtle College. Of these, two – Norwich School of Art and Design and Writtle College – were small specialist colleges, one for art and design and the other for land-based industries, whose provision complemented that offered by Anglia College of Higher Education. Writtle College later withdrew from its partnership with APU to develop closer links with the University of Essex.

The franchise partnerships with those colleges meant a growth in the student numbers of Anglia College of Higher Education, enabling it to bid successfully to become a polytechnic. The new institution was called Anglia Polytechnic. Some 18 months later, in the wake of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act that removed the binary divide between universities and polytechnics, the institution achieved university status, as Anglia Polytechnic University (APU).

The early 1990s saw APU forming relationships with other further education and sixth form colleges in the four counties of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. APU has always been clear that its patch does not extend to Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, both of which are served by local universities in the form of the University of Hertfordshire and the University of Luton respectively. Homerton College, School of Health Studies, Peterborough Regional College and Stamford College are the most recent institutions to become members of the Regional University Partnership.

With the development of the Regional Network in 1992 came the establishment of a Regional Office to act as a conduit between the University and its partner colleges. A senior member of University staff was the main driver for the establishment of the regional office and subsequently became its Director. The Director of the Regional

Office described the vision for the regional network as the creation of a coherent academic community. In the context of the Government's focus on widening participation and the calls for growth in the higher education sector, the Regional Office was seen as an important element of APU's response.

By 2002, the relationship between the University and its partner colleges was ready to move to the next stage in order to take forward developments that had not been fully realised under the Regional Network. Proposals for the Regional University Partnership were considered and approved by APU's Senate in September 2002. The process of implementing the proposals has been under way since then.

Purpose of the partnership

The purposes of the original Regional Network were to widen participation in higher education and establish the then Anglia College of Higher Education as a regional institution at a time when these issues were not the high profile priorities they are today. In building the relationships with a wider network of colleges in the four counties of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, APU also recognised the infrastructure difficulties of delivering higher education in rural and sometimes remote areas.

A senior manager of one of the regional colleges described the purpose of the original Regional Network as creating a responsive higher education institution to meet local needs, saying: "APU set about creating a regional university aimed at attracting non-traditional students into higher education." At the time of the Regional Network's establishment, his perception was that other universities in the Eastern region did not engage in partnerships with further education colleges or pursue a widening participation agenda.

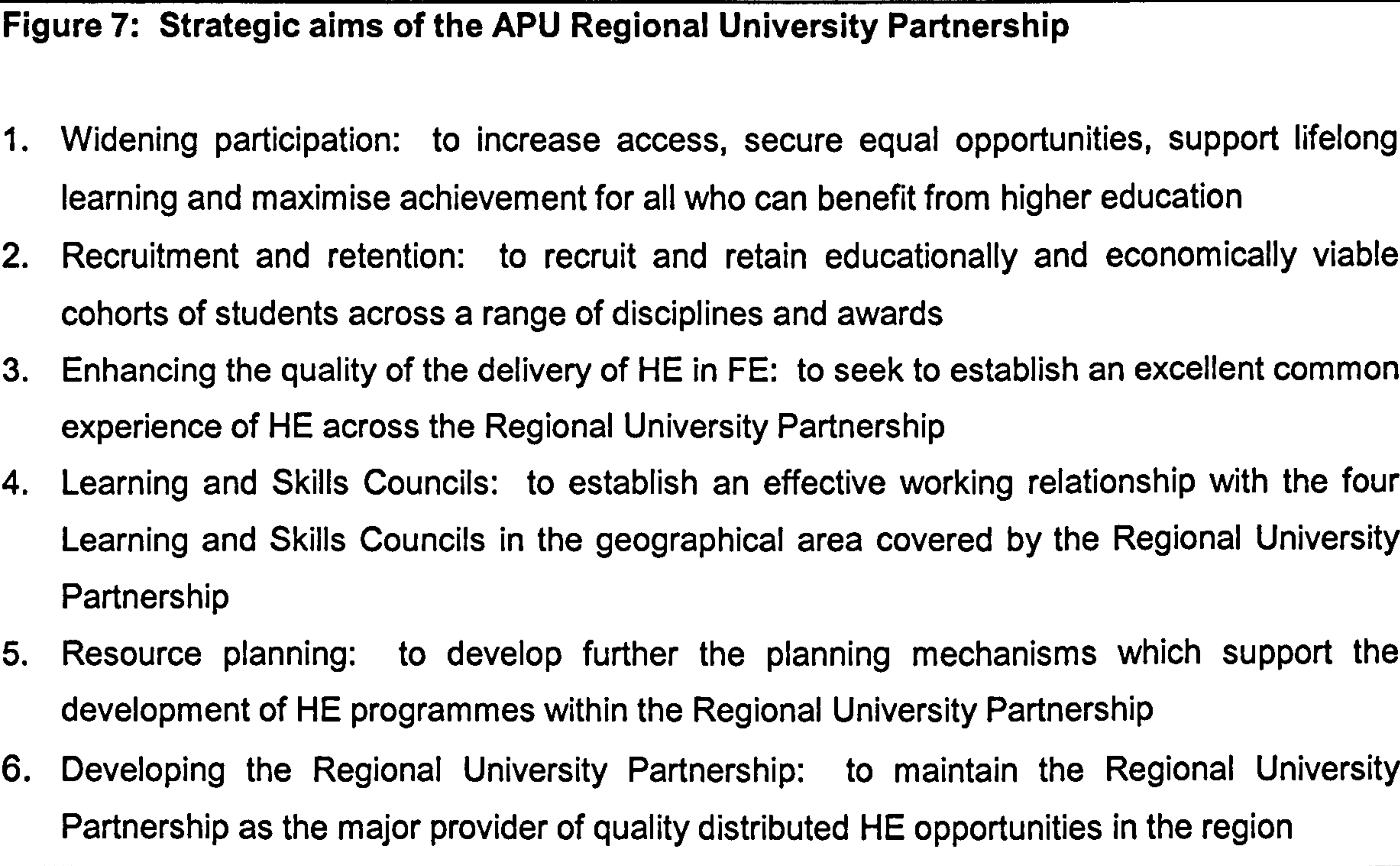
This view was echoed by the Principal of another college. When his institution chose to become part of the Regional Network, it was because he recognised APU's readiness to work collaboratively with partner colleges. He commented: "It was clear that the college would be involved in decision-making and would be a true partner." It was not evident to him that other higher education institutions with which his college had franchise relationships were as committed to genuine partnerships with colleges.

A recent comment from a University spokesperson underlines this commitment:

[APU is] a local university that draws most of its students from families with no previous experience of the higher education system. Many are local, many are mature students or part-timers, and a large number will continue living at home with their parents while they study. Yet these are the groups that need to be drawn in if the 50% target is to be reached. (Guardian Education, August 19 2003)

The development of the Regional University Partnership is taking relationships between APU and its partner colleges to a new level. The University's Vice Chancellor described the establishment of the Regional University Partnership as a move to enforce common standards and promote a sense of collegiality between staff teaching the same subject across the region. "We don't want two classes of citizen." A representative from one of the regional colleges sees the new model of the Regional University Partnership as a much stronger vision than the Regional Network.

The Regional University Partnership has six strategic aims as set out in Figure 7 below.



Source: APU

How the partnership operates

Direction and management of the partnership

The APU Regional University Partnership is a new form of organisational structure developed by APU and its regional college partners that brings all member institutions within a common regional framework. The Partnership is overseen by a Regional University Academic Council chaired by the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor. The membership of the Council numbers some 30 staff, including representatives of the 23 colleges, the Dean of each regional faculty and other APU staff. The Council reports to the Regional Principals meeting via the Regional Principals Strategic Policy Steering Group which is chaired on a rota basis by one of the regional Principals. The Council's terms of reference largely relate to the Regional University as a whole and include:

- Co-ordination of marketing;
- Making recommendations on the Regional University's strategic plan and co-ordination of Regional Faculty strategic plans;
- Promotion of recruitment, progression and retention;
- Promotion of equal opportunities;
- Co-ordination of staff development policies;
- Support for research, development and consultancy activities; and
- Co-ordination of delivery and development of provision.

APU is a member of the Regional University Partnership as well as being the validating institution and funding conduit. The Regional University Partnership is managed through APU's Regional Office.

Partnership infrastructure

The Regional University Partnership operates through a framework of joint committees that report to the Regional University Academic Council. These are the:

- Regional planning approvals sub-committee;
- Regional Principals strategy policy group; and
- A strategic liaison group for each individual partnership.

The Partnership has five regional faculties that bring partner colleges into a direct relationship with APU Schools, of which there are nine. The Deans of the regional faculties are drawn from the University although there is scope in future for the Dean to come from a regional partner college. Each regional faculty has an administrator from the Regional Office and an academic member of staff formerly linked to the Regional Office.

Each regional faculty is overseen by a regional faculty board. There is representation on regional faculty boards from the University and partner colleges. Faculty boards will have a representative from the University's Academic Office on them. The terms of reference for the regional faculty boards were under discussion for implementation at the start of academic year 2003-04.

The Regional Principals Strategic Policy Steering Group organises an annual Regional Principals Conference.

Partnership agreement

Each regional college in the Regional University Partnership has an individual partnership agreement with APU. The agreement is valid for five years from signing, with appendices relating to higher education programmes, student numbers and financial details updated annually. The areas covered by the partnership agreement are set out in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Areas covered by the APU Regional University Partnership agreement between each college and APU

- Partners
- Regulatory framework
- Standards
- Assessment
- Awards/modules
- Marketing and advertising
- Students
- Staff
- Resources
- Financial and statistical arrangements
- Other rights and responsibilities
- Formalities

Source: APU

The agreement does not impose an exclusive relationship with APU on individual college partners but does ask each college to provide a statement explaining the need for additional relationships and making a commitment to maintaining quality in relation to all such relationships. This is in line with the HEFCE code of practice for franchise partnerships.

Financial agreement

The financial aspect of the partnership agreement is that the University retains a percentage of the income from HEFCE for the higher education programmes delivered by the colleges. The colleges receive the balance of the HEFCE funding. In addition the University collects the tuition fee income for higher education programmes delivered by the regional colleges and distributes it to the colleges against an agreed formula.

The colleges interviewed were satisfied with the financial aspects of their relationship with APU. They see the arrangements as transparent across the whole regional partnership. One college described the financial arrangements as representing value for money. One college was particularly appreciative of the fact that APU has never sought to pull back from its commitments to regional colleges and the regional university vision even when it might have been financially reasonable to do so in the short term. Another college described the flexibility demonstrated by APU in absorbing colleges' shortfalls in recruitment on the one hand and enabling growth on the other.

Data collection

The HEFCE funding under the Restructuring and Collaboration Fund enabled APU and its partner colleges to focus on the harmonisation of software to enable student data to be transmitted between partners. This makes the comparison of records held by colleges with those held by the University a relatively straightforward process. A college representative reported that data collection systems work well across the partnership, after some initial problems in the early days.

Quality assurance

The Regional Network that preceded the Regional University Partnership was the subject of two QAA continuation reviews as well as subject reviews and was cited as a model of good practice by QAA. However, there were some tensions about the consistency of approach across the Regional Network. According to the University's Vice Chancellor,

As the partnership has grown, it has also become increasingly difficult to ensure that the same policies relating to quality assurance, such as double and anonymous marking, were operating evenly. Time and energy have been wasted in reinventing wheels in some fields, so that a number of courses with the same title (such as business studies) have been developed using different modules. Universities tend to swing between a big brother regulator and policeman role on the one hand, which stifles creativity and innovation and alienates staff in partnership institutions and, on the other, allowing too much freedom because the complexity of the task defeats them. Neither is good for higher education. Either way almost inevitably produces tensions in the relationship and a poorer experience for students. (Malone-Lee 2002)

Under the Regional University Partnership arrangements, the regional faculty boards will have a key role in assuring the quality of the programmes delivered in the name of the University. The regional faculty boards will report to the University's Academic Standards, Quality and Enhancement Committee, which has been given delegated responsibility for these activities by the University's Senate.

Programme planning, development and delivery

Joint planning of provision across the regional partnership has become more significant in recent years. Under the Regional Network arrangements, there was a regional planning mechanism in the shape of a committee chaired by APU's Deputy Vice Chancellor and including staff from regional colleges. The committee's role was to determine whether new programmes proposed by the University or by regional colleges were given approval to proceed. When the Regional Network was first established, the University did not bring its own new course proposals to the regional planning committee, but, after this was raised as an issue by regional Principals, they agreed to do so. One college saw the regional planning arrangements as offering a forum to ensure that internal competition was avoided rather than as a vehicle for rationalising higher education provision across the partnership.

Under the new Regional University Partnership arrangements, there will be a Regional Planning Approvals Sub-Committee that reports to the Regional University Academic Council. Each regional faculty board will have a curriculum planning and development

remit. The regional faculty boards will report to the Regional University Academic Council which in turn reports to the Regional Principals meeting via the Regional Principals Strategic Policy Steering Group.

Within the Regional University Partnership, agreement has been reached on a single curriculum structure and credit accumulation and transfer system. Work is under way on pooling module delivery. The development activity is funded out of the allocation from HEFCE's Restructuring and Collaboration Fund. If there are to be moves in future towards joint delivery of programmes, the issue of the structure of the academic year will need to be resolved. APU works in two semesters each year. Partner colleges still have three terms, although many of them have semesterised their higher education programmes. A move to a common semester basis is one step; the next may be to consider a centralised timetabling system. This would be essential if joint delivery, for example by videoconferencing, were to become more widespread.

Some colleges in the Regional University Partnership deliver all three years of degree programmes. These colleges tend to be the ones with an established track record of higher education delivery, including good QAA review outcomes. Other colleges deliver years 1 and 2 only.

Access to facilities of the University

The Restructuring and Collaboration project has provided videoconferencing facilities that are capable of linking up to 20 points simultaneously. The funding has also been used to implement a shared virtual learning environment and to improve access to information across the partnership, for example by regional colleges to APU's intranet. The Regional Office co-ordinates a regional staff development programme for regional colleges.

The partnership agreement makes provision for students in regional partner colleges to access APU's libraries as Associate Members and for some reciprocal arrangements between APU and the larger colleges in the partnership. Staff access to University facilities is by prior agreement.

Marketing of colleges' higher education provision

The Regional Office led the development of a web-based regional prospectus for regional colleges' higher education provision. This has been updated to reflect the development of the Regional University Partnership.

The Regional Office designed a template for events to celebrate student achievements at partner colleges. A college that held the first such event for its higher education students in 2002 spoke warmly of the support of APU senior staff, including the Vice Chancellor, who attended the event. Each event celebrates an APU Student of the Year at the college in question.

A brand logo has been agreed for the Regional University Partnership. The intention is that the logo will appear on signs at all partner institutions. However, there are some tensions around the extent to which colleges feel comfortable marketing their higher education offer under the auspices of the Regional University Partnership, with some preferring to retain their own identity in their local area.

The partnership's contribution to widening participation

Range of provision

The provision offered by the college members of the Regional University Partnership covers a wide range, from art and design to visual studies. An annual prospectus of the higher education opportunities on offer at regional university partner institutions is published. The colleges' higher education provision has generally developed in areas that offer progression from their vocational further education provision. It also reflects the staff expertise and resources available in partner colleges.

Student numbers

The regional colleges account for around 22% of APU's student numbers. One regional college doubled its higher education provision in a five-year period, an achievement it attributes to the partnership with APU. Another college spoke of a systematic increase in the amount of higher education provision delivered locally. The college Principal attributes this partly to the way in which the college has targeted growth in each curriculum area, both through the development of new programmes and the expansion of existing programmes. His college now delivers all three years of a

degree programme where previously students transferred to APU for the final year. Another factor in this college's growth was the decision to form a county-based consortium with three other colleges to bid for additional numbers from HEFCE in 2000-01. The consortium was successful in its bid. The numbers were subsequently transferred into the APU regional pot.

Table 9 shows how many students were following higher education courses at the APU partner colleges in 1999-2000 to 2001-02 and the growth in the three-year period.

| Table 9: APU Regional University Partnership's contribution to widening participation –numbers of full-time equivalent students | | | |
|--|-----------|---------|---------|
| | 1999-2000 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 |
| Numbers of FTE students following higher education programmes in partner colleges | 2948 | 3023 | 3472 |
| Growth in FTE students | - | 75 | 449 |
| Percentage growth | - | 2.5% | 15% |

Source: APU

The table shows a significant increase in the numbers of higher education students on higher education programmes in the regional partner colleges over the three-year period.

Perceptions of the benefits of the partnership

One regional college representative said his main criterion for the success of the partnership with APU was growth in higher education student numbers. However, he acknowledged that other aspects were equally important, including the level of support provided by APU, the quality of staff training and the openness and transparency of the relationship.

APU's regional partnership has been successful in attracting funds outside mainstream funding for higher education students. The University and its partner colleges are clear that the strength of the partnership is a powerful factor in its bids for additional funding. The best example of this is the allocation of £1.05 million in 2001 from HEFCE's Restructuring and Collaboration fund. The funding covers three years and is being

used to fund videoconferencing facilities, the development of a shared virtual learning environment, associated data links across the Regional University Partnership, better student information systems and communication systems for staff and students across the partnership. A college representative commented positively on the benefits that colleges had derived from the investment made possible by the funding.

One college manager cited APU's support for higher education curriculum development in partner colleges. A specific example was the development of foundation degrees where APU had devoted time, energy and funding including training and development of college staff. A manager from another college agreed. He had no doubt that his college has benefited from the partnership. It very quickly mounted higher education programmes in a large number of curriculum areas where there had previously been none. The college manager acknowledged: "The partnership with APU gave us a substantial knowledge base and a flexible modularised curriculum on which to build our programme of higher education activities."

However, one college representative who was otherwise very positive about the support provided by APU in curriculum development, expressed the view that college partners could have been more closely involved in foundation degree developments from the beginning.

Relationships between partners

The colleges were overwhelmingly positive about their relationships with the University. One college Principal valued the University's openness and transparency as regards funding and decision-making. He was appreciative of the support for the partnership evidenced by APU senior managers including the Vice Chancellor. He referred to the Vice Chancellor's description of APU as a partner in the Regional University Partnership, saying it provided a strong indication of the Vice Chancellor's commitment to the arrangements. His perception was that support for the Regional University Partnership permeates APU, although he recognised that there may be varying levels of enthusiasm within APU faculties for dealing with partner colleges and treating them as equals.

Another college representative described APU's Academic Office as "excellent", adding: "It works well and provides a good network for academic administration staff in colleges across the regional network." A senior representative of one of the most

recent institutions to join the partnership described the relationship between the University and her institution in terms of mutuality and shared respect.

The development of the Regional University Partnership represents a step change in the relationship between APU and its regional college partners. By 2002, some 10 years after the creation of the regional network, the relationship between APU staff and regional colleges had matured to the extent that APU staff were keen to have direct relationships with partner colleges rather than have contacts mediated by the Regional Office. But, in order to make the major leap forward, University staff had to be prepared to see college staff as their equals and recognise that further education has much to bring to the delivery of higher education including a stronger focus on strategies to retain students. In addition, a focus on a more planned and consistent approach to the higher education that was being delivered across the regional partnership prompted in University colleagues a real willingness to look positively at developments.

One college representative welcomed APU's approach to future developments, particularly its readiness to negotiate rather than seek to impose its preferences. She recognised the scope for the new partnership between her institution and APU to grow or to stay as it is, depending on how things develop.

Future development of the partnership

The Regional Network was established in 1992. The implementation of the Regional University Partnership in 2003 will take the collaboration between the University and partner colleges to a new stage of development. Academic year 2003-04 sees the first year of the full implementation of the new arrangements.

College representatives welcomed the move towards a greater level of certainty and consistency in delivery to underpin the quality of the higher education delivered by regional colleges. However, one college representative speculated that there may be a tendency for some colleges to feel a sense of reduced ownership and rather less in control of their own destinies in the new partnership. The ability to offer modules matched to local needs and demand has been a key feature of the partnership over the years and it is hoped that this will be retained within a consistent quality learning experience for regional university students.

Once the new arrangements have had a chance to become established, there will be further opportunities to collaborate on a broader range of functions and services. The University's Vice Chancellor extolled the benefits of the arrangements that would enable regional partners to work together for their mutual benefit while avoiding the "unnecessary hassle" of mergers (Malone-Lee 2002).

CHAPTER 7: CASE STUDY 4, THE BEDFORDSHIRE FEDERATION FOR FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Membership and form of partnership

The Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education is a partnership between the University of Luton and the four colleges in Luton and Bedfordshire. Members of the partnership are shown in Table 10. The partnership covers the area bounded by the administrative borders of the Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council, the local education authorities for the county of Bedfordshire and the town of Luton. In regional terms, it is located in HEFCE’s Eastern region that is co-terminous with the administrative boundaries of the East of England Development Agency.

| Table 10: Members of the Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Barnfield College | Luton Sixth Form College |
| Bedford College | University of Luton |
| Dunstable College | |

Source: University of Luton

The Bedfordshire Federation comprises a series of individual franchise partnerships between the University of Luton and each of its partner colleges (see page 21 for a discussion of the franchise partnership model). Two of the colleges also receive direct funding from HEFCE.

Background and history of the partnership

The South Bedfordshire Colleges’ Federation was proposed in 1992 as a forum for co-operation to promote the interests of further and higher education across the Luton-Dunstable-Chiltern conurbation and beyond. It brought together the University of Luton with Barnfield College in Luton, Luton Sixth Form College and Dunstable College. The agreement did not preclude any of the partners collaborating with other further or higher education institutions. The Federation was formally launched in 1994.

When the South Bedfordshire Federation was formed, Bedford College, situated some 18 miles to the north of the Luton/Dunstable conurbation, was already in a partnership with De Montfort University which has a campus on the outskirts of the town. Bedford College subsequently joined the Federation in 1997 while still retaining its links with De Montfort. The Federation became the Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education to reflect the inclusion of all the further and higher education institutions in Luton and Bedfordshire.

The Federation has revisited its purpose and organisation on several occasions, largely in response to changes in the external environment that signalled a greater focus on collaborative models of working. One of the reviews took place in autumn 1997 following the publication of the Kennedy and Dearing reports. This proposed a framework for closer collaboration on transition routes from further to higher education and on improving success in qualifications up to FE level 3. The Federation continued to recognise the independence of individual members and respected their distinctive missions and purposes. It chose not to pursue the option offered by HEFCE to transform the relationships between the University and each college into Associate College arrangements that would have bound the colleges more formally to the University.

Purpose of the partnership

In 1992, the proposal document for the original South Bedfordshire Colleges' Federation set out three areas of activity that it was intended the Federation would address: academic provision, academic support services and managerial support services. The managerial support services were not evident in a recast summary statement of the Federation's aims and rationale in March 1994 when the partnership was formally launched. The aims and rationale were summarised in five statements as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Aims and rationale for the South Bedfordshire Colleges' Federation (1994)

1. To diversify the routes into the three colleges and the University, and to increase participation rates amongst non-traditional groups, partly through enhanced promotion, counselling and guidance.
2. To work towards a comprehensive availability of qualification courses and training in terms of time and place, and through the adoption of fully modular credit accumulation and transfer schemes, such that students/trainees may follow a programme at more than one centre if they wish.
3. To stimulate and expand open, distance and work-based learning.
4. To enhance special needs provision.
5. To encourage adult education.
6. To provide improved staff development opportunities related to curriculum content and process, through greater collaboration between the four institutions.

Source: University of Luton

A further review of the rationale, terms of reference and membership of the Federation took place in autumn 1998, after Bedford College became a member. Members reviewed existing and previous partnership documents to produce a new vision paper, complete with revised terms of reference. In spring 2000, further proposals were put forward for a "Model framework to enhance the planning, quality, range and accessibility of further and higher education in Bedfordshire." The framework identified a number of areas that would be a special focus of the Federation, including widening participation, foundation degrees and the design of a post-16 credit accumulation and transfer scheme. It proposed developing a five-year strategic plan for the Federation with an expectation that all member institutions would harmonise their development plans to "underpin the mission of the Federation as a whole". The framework proposed a number of standing committees for such areas as quality assurance, marketing and curriculum design and delivery, with the need to establish ad hoc project teams as required.

Representatives of the Federation's members summed up the Federation's purpose under two main themes. One is the progression of students from further to higher education while the other is about institutional mutual support and collaboration to present a more powerful voice for further and higher education in the region. Members of the Federation share a common interest in all issues to do with the blurring of the divide between further and higher education.

For the University, its partnerships with colleges are a means of extending their focus on widening participation into a wider range of communities and constituencies. The role of the Federation in building the supply chain of students is a significant motivation.

The Vice Principal of one college saw the Federation being focused on further education issues in its early days. However, he commented that the colleges, together with the University, now have a shared focus on higher education issues, particularly strategic and funding issues. These views were echoed by the Principal of another college who also emphasised the early focus of the Federation in bidding jointly for additional funding from, for example, the European Social Fund and Skills Development Fund. He, too, reflected the change of emphasis to increasing higher education opportunities for local people. Students from the area served by his college who do choose to progress to higher education tend to choose an institution within a 50-mile radius of their home. The role of local colleges and the local University in providing opportunities that are attractive to local people is therefore critical. The sixth form college sees its higher education provision as representing a contribution to the community.

For the colleges, the Federation remains an important forum for sharing ideas and issues of common interest or concern in relation to further education. One of the college Principals commented that the colleges were themselves working together more effectively now, as evidenced by initiatives between Barnfield and Bedford colleges to apply for Centre of Vocational Excellence status in two areas of the colleges' provision.

There will be an annual review of the Federation in future.

How the partnership operates

Direction and management of the partnership

The Federation meets monthly except during the summer and Christmas breaks. Meetings are attended by the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor, the Principals and Vice Principals of the four colleges. The Vice Chancellor and other senior members of the University attend on an occasional basis. The Executive Director of the local LSC attends meetings once a term. The chair of the Federation rotates and the chair provides the clerking arrangements for meetings.

Partnership infrastructure

At the outset of the Federation, an executive body was envisaged but it was opposed by one of the colleges on the grounds that it would have compromised the autonomy of its corporation. The Federation has no formal infrastructure. Until October 2003, when the University established a college office to administer student enrolments for higher education students in its partner colleges, no separate budget was identified for co-ordination of Federation activities. The Federation tried to adapt its structure to reflect various funded initiatives, for example widening participation projects, but it proved difficult to reconcile these structures within a Federation wide pattern. Nevertheless, the widening participation projects (funded initially by FEFC then LSC and HEFCE) provided a foundation for the Federation to develop effective ways of working collaboratively across all member institutions.

Proposals in spring 2000 for a revised model framework for the Federation included a proposed organisational structure for the Federation of a steering group that would oversee the work of:

- standing committees for curriculum design and delivery, quality assurance, joint marketing and public relations, employer partnerships and staff development;
- the Bedfordshire Access Consortium; and
- ad hoc project teams that would, for example, co-ordinate joint bids on behalf of the Federation for external funding.

However, no funding was available to support the proposed infrastructure and it was not implemented. There are a number of related groups that meet regularly beyond the monthly meetings of the Federation itself. The Vice Principals meet monthly as a group.

Funding provided in 2001 by the local LSC gave the first opportunity to establish dedicated posts within the Federation of further and higher education co-ordinator posts in each college. The posts were identified in the funding proposals as supporting the transition from further to higher education. In making the proposals, the Federation was clear that transition to higher education as a result of increased achievement at college could be to any higher education institution and not just the University of Luton. Increased progression to higher education is regarded as a success in itself. In three of the four colleges, the co-ordinator posts were filled internally by existing members of

staff released from some or all of their other duties. One college advertised and filled the post externally. The college co-ordinators meet monthly with the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor. These meetings were described as very helpful by one of the co-ordinators. The University is recruiting a Director of Further and Higher Education who will lead the partnership activity with colleges at an operational level. The plan is to establish four other groups:

- Programme development groups, one for each major subject/discipline area;
- A post-16 credit accumulation and transfer group;
- An information technology and communications development group; and
- A marketing and PR group.

Partnership agreement

The University has a partnership agreement with each of the colleges in the Federation for their higher education provision. It is a two-page document with seven appendices. The areas covered by the partnership agreement are shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Areas covered by partnership agreement between the University of Luton and a partner college

1. Removal of barriers to access to higher education for local students
2. Establishment of progression routes into higher education for local students
3. Guarantee of an appropriate offer of a higher education place to any student of the partner colleges, provided certain criteria are met
4. Provision of a specific contact in the University's access and admissions department to act as a point of reference and advice throughout the admissions cycle
5. The University's expectations of the partner college.

Source: Luton Sixth Form College

There are also appendices that deal with: marketing; staff development; access for college staff and students to the University's facilities; requests for specialist assistance; notifying the college of the enrolment and progression of its former students of the college; allocation of University student tutors to assist college lecturers in course delivery; and nomination by the college of a central co-ordinator for the relationship with the University.

Financial agreement

Some of the University's contracts with partner colleges are long-standing. There are currently two types of contracts, one for franchised provision and the other for delivery by a partner college of elements of the University's own courses. The University undertook a review of contracts with partner colleges in 2002-03 with the intention of capturing previous agreements in the revised contracts.

The financial agreement is that the University retains a percentage of the HEFCE income and tuition fee income for the higher education programmes that come under the auspices of the Federation. The remainder of the income is passed on to partner colleges. The current system of payment to colleges was reviewed and improved in 2001-02 after the colleges indicated that a system of annual payment in arrears was not acceptable. Colleges are now paid termly in arrears.

Data collection

Each term, the University carries out a verification exercise on student numbers being delivered by the colleges. One Principal commented that the information gathered by the University in the verification exercise rarely coincided exactly with the information held by the college about its higher education students, a statement that was echoed by another Principal in the Federation. He attributed the reason for the disparity to a lack of continuity in the administration of the Federation, adding that there had been a lack of focus on the Federation below senior management level within the University, with no partnership office being established. However, plans by the University to appoint a Director of Further and Higher Education should help to address this issue.

Quality assurance

The University has quality assurance procedures for franchised provision delivered by partner colleges. Liaison tutors from the University link with course tutors in the colleges. College course tutors provide quality monitoring reports to University course review boards that in turn report to the University's Academic Standards Committee.

There are differing views in the colleges about the value of the arrangements. The Principal of one college commented that his college valued the assistance it received from the University on quality assurance. However, representatives of other colleges regard the University's quality assurance systems as cumbersome and bureaucratic.

The colleges undergo their own rigorous quality inspections by OFSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate who operate to a quality framework that does not reflect the one used in higher education. For example, Barnfield College had its OFSTED/ALI inspection in 2003 and achieved the top grades for leadership and management and quality assurance and in four of its curriculum areas. Nevertheless, the quality system used by the University – and in higher education in general – does not explicitly acknowledge the strengths of college partners as judged within further education's inspection framework.

Programme planning, development and delivery

The Bedfordshire Federation has had some shared discussions about forward planning of provision. The view of the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor is that all 16+ routes offered by partner colleges should have 18+ progression routes, either in a partner college or in the University. Some curriculum mapping has been undertaken, mainly by the Deputy Vice Chancellor and a senior University colleague.

In the Deputy Vice Chancellor's view, it was appropriate that the colleges should concentrate on higher national certificates and diplomas, foundation degrees and some Level 3 top up provision. She identified a longer-term aim to transfer work at Levels 1 and 2 to partner colleges to allow the University to focus on Levels 3 and 4 and research activity. This aim is generally supported by partner colleges. The figures in Table 11 demonstrate the shift in student numbers to the colleges over recent years. These amount to a significant shift in the proportion of University student numbers studying at Federation colleges.

One college indicated that it had no aspirations to develop large volumes of Level 3 higher education provision. It was, however, responding to the demands of students in developing a top up course for a new foundation degree to enable students who could not afford to travel to the University to gain an honours degree via the college. Another of the Federation colleges was working with the University to develop and deliver a Level 3 top up to degree level for their Graphic Design students. There is also a developing element of NVQ Level 4 top-up to post-experience qualifications, at HE levels 3 and 4.

The colleges' perception is that they drive programme innovation. They see very little innovation by the University which they regard as offering a traditional higher education curriculum that is not sufficiently flexible or attractive to many further education

students. Two of the colleges said they would like to see the University take a more proactive role in first identifying higher education markets and opportunities for new higher education programmes and then taking the lead in developing relevant products. Some of the colleges believe they do not have the capacity for significant curriculum development at higher education level and would be happy to use University-devised programmes. One of them added that his college would also welcome getting involved in more collaborative developments.

Access to facilities of the University

The partnership agreement between the University and each of the colleges provides for students with Luton admission cards to access University facilities. In practice, the students who are most likely to take advantage of the opportunities to do so are those who are following their higher education programmes in the colleges in Luton or Dunstable. The distance between Bedford and Luton precludes regular use by Bedford College's higher education students of the University's facilities, although a bus is laid on from time to time to transport students to Luton.

Marketing of colleges' higher education provision

The University markets the colleges' higher education provision. The marketing is described as adequate for full-time provision but less good for part-time provision. Each college also markets its own higher education provision itself. The colleges believe that their own marketing activities are more likely to attract students than any joint marketing by the University.

The partnership's contribution to widening participation

Range of provision

The University defines itself as a widening participation institution. As indicated above, it sees its partnerships with colleges as the primary means of reaching out to students who would not go to the University for their higher education programmes. In common with all other higher education institutions, the University has been refocusing its mission, leading to a discontinuation of some programmes that were no longer deemed to be viable or in line with the new mission.

The colleges see all their higher education provision as widening participation possibly with the exception of the Sports Science programme at Bedford College which is more like a traditional higher education course programme in that it is full-time and recruits nationally as well as locally. The colleges' higher education provision has developed in areas that offer progression from their vocational further education provision. It also reflects the staff expertise and resources available in the colleges.

Student numbers

The colleges in the Federation have steadily increased their higher education student numbers. A review of the purposes of the Federation has given more focus to the target setting process for the colleges' student numbers. The colleges were given their first formal allocation of student numbers through the HEFCE Additional Student Number allocation in 1999-2000. The allocation covered a two-three year period and gave phased increases in student recruitment over that time. As with most modern universities, the Federation enrolments fell short of the full allocation and there were no further applications for additional student numbers. However, there is still a concerted effort made each year to ensure that the University's HEFCE contract numbers remain high enough to fund growth in college numbers. The University saw this as particularly important when its own enrolments were stabilising and there was a danger of restricted contract numbers. The University has therefore confirmed with HEFCE its plans for still further increases in higher education teaching at Federation colleges.

While one of the colleges has delivered exceptional growth in the higher education provision funded by the University of Luton, other colleges in the Federation have not consistently met their higher education targets for the student numbers offered by the University. There is no financial penalty for the colleges in not meeting higher education target numbers from the University.

Table 11 shows how many students were following higher education courses at the Bedfordshire Federation partner colleges in 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02 and the growth in the three-year period.

Table 11: The Bedfordshire Federation’s contribution to widening participation – numbers of full-time equivalent students

| | 1999-2000 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 |
|---|-----------|---------|---------|
| Numbers of FTE students following higher education programmes in partner colleges | 170 | 190 | 320 |
| Growth in FTE students | - | 20 | 130 |
| Percentage growth | - | 12% | 68% |

Source: University of Luton

Perceptions of the benefits of the partnership

The colleges were generally positive about their relationships with the University. They welcomed the responsiveness of the University to new programmes proposed by partner colleges. The colleges believe that the University is content to let the colleges get on with the development of higher education programmes in non-traditional areas. One of the college representatives was positive about the opportunities the relationship with the University gave his college to continue developing and expanding its higher education. Others were happy to deliver more higher education but believed they did not have the capacity for programme developed and would have preferred the University to do more in this respect.

The colleges welcomed the funding that had enabled them to appoint higher education co-ordinators. The co-ordinators were perceived to add value and one Principal commented that he would continue to fund the role in future even if additional, earmarked funding were no longer made available for the post.

Relationships between partners

The colleges were generally positive about their relationships with the University. One Principal described the relationship between the college and the University as friendly, adding that the University is quick to respond to the college’s needs. The University does not impose restrictions on partners as regards links with other institutions. One of the partners has a long-standing partnership with De Montfort University which has a

campus on the outskirts of the town. It continues to receive funding from De Montfort for one of its higher education programmes.

There are perceptions in the colleges that the University can be difficult to deal with at faculty level. The colleges recognise that there are differential levels of support from faculties for the colleges' higher education provision. Some University colleagues find it hard to reconcile the allocation of student numbers to the colleges at a time when their own financial position is under pressure. They see the development of full-time higher education provision in the partner colleges as direct competition. They seem to be more willing to engage with part-time developments. All colleges acknowledge the support and commitment of the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor in securing improvements in the relationships between colleges and University faculties.

Future development of the partnership

In response to the 14-19 White Paper and the Partnerships for Progression initiative, the Bedfordshire Federation took a decision in 2002 to form a broader alliance to enable them to meet the challenging targets of the local LSC and, eventually, the 50% participation target for higher education. This followed an acknowledgement that the Federation had not achieved as much as had been hoped and that a more proactive strategic stance was needed. The new body is called the Bedfordshire Alliance for Higher Education and comprises the five institutions already in membership of the Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education, together with representatives of Luton and Bedfordshire upper schools and employers.

The new Alliance was not yet a reality at the time of the interviews with colleagues in the Federation. It was awaiting a business plan and funding from the *Aimhigher*: Partnerships for Progression initiative to make it a reality. The Deputy Vice Chancellor's view was that the Alliance and the Partnerships for Progression initiative should be used to unite all disparate strands of partnership activity that were currently in progress. However, she has a concern that Partnerships for Progression will not deliver the step change that is needed if wider participation is to become a reality. She indicated that she would not be keen to disband the Bedfordshire Federation until the Alliance had proved itself as she thought that the Federation was beginning to make things happen. A decision was subsequently taken that the Federation would have a continued role within the wider context of the work of the Alliance.

The appointment of the higher education co-ordinators referred to above is the first plank in implementing the new body. The University's Director of Further and Higher Education Liaison, when appointed, will report to a board that comprises all five heads of institutions and their respective deputies plus a member of the local LSC executive. The board will also co-opt for individual meetings, and for longer periods as appropriate, representatives of the upper schools and employers across Bedfordshire and Luton.

Colleges expressed the view that the Government needs to look seriously at how to support colleges to deliver the growth in higher education that is projected for them in the higher education White Paper. One representative commented that, if the bulk of the growth is to come from further education colleges working in partnership with higher education institutions, the Government should be incentivising partnerships accordingly. The incentivisation should not necessarily extend to encouraging merger between universities and colleges although the option should not be discounted where it is felt to be an appropriate model. He does not believe it would work between the institutions in the Federation: "The further education environment is about open access, widening participation and parity of esteem for academic and vocational routes alike. It attracts a different market for its higher education opportunities than the University."

The University has a new Vice Chancellor from autumn 2003. He has already underlined the University's commitment to partnership with Federation colleges and endorsed the decision to see continued increases in the numbers of higher education students studying at Federation colleges.

CHAPTER 8: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, three types of analysis of the case studies and associated findings are presented. The first is an analysis of factual characteristics to provide a descriptive overview of the case study partnerships. The second analysis is of the quantitative measures used by partnerships to measure their contribution to widening participation and the value of the partnership. The third analysis is thematic and based on the qualitative evidence collected in the case studies.

The qualitative evidence was gathered through a study of documentation (Appendix 5) provided by the partnerships and from semi-structured interviews with a range of people (Table 1) involved with the partnerships. The documentation provided by each (with the exception of HETP where it was possible to collect most of what had been written about or produced by the partnership) was not extensive. The researcher was aware of the possibility of selectivity on the part of respondents, both in passing on documentation and in the answers they gave to questions in semi-structured interviews. Care was taken to triangulate information with other sources.

The information collected from the semi-structured interviews reflects the limitations of qualitative data. It reflects the views of respondents and the researcher, both of which may be both subjective and subject to bias. Where information appeared to be anecdotal, efforts were made to triangulate it with other sources before including it in the case studies. That is to say, information provided by respondents during the semi-structured interviews was not accepted at face value but checked against other sources before accepting it as a valid piece of evidence to include in the relevant case study.

The respondents provided different types of insights into the shape and direction of the partnerships. A range of perspectives was needed in order to answer the research questions. Their responses were probed by reference to findings in the literature or against the answers provided by other respondents. The heads of the partnerships were all senior members of university staff. Their seniority meant that they had a clear view as to the role of the partnership in terms of its future strategic direction and its advantages and potential disadvantages to the university. They could also see how differential levels of engagement by university departmental or faculty heads could

create problems for college staff. The higher education institutional heads/deputy heads regarded the partnership as primarily about regional positioning and providing a supply chain of students. The further education institutional heads/deputy heads spoke of the progression opportunities made available to their students and the scope provided by the partnership for growing their higher education portfolios. The college-based higher education co-ordinators expressed the frustrations of dealing at operational level with higher and further education systems for funding, quality assurance and data collection. They also discussed the practical difficulties arising from the conditions of service for further education staff engaged in higher education work, including a lack of time for research or scholarly activity. All respondents commented on the advantages and disadvantages of the partnership arrangement in which they were involved. The selection of respondents for the case studies appears to have provided an appropriate range of people involved in the respective partnerships.

Analysis 1: Partnership characteristics

The case studies were analysed against 12 characteristics to provide a descriptive overview of each partnership. The characteristics used were:

- name of lead institution;
- form of partnership;
- date of establishment;
- size of partnership, in terms of the number of member institutions;
- size of partnership, in terms of the number of higher education students in partner colleges;
- partnership agreements;
- partnership aims;
- management and infrastructure;
- financial arrangements;
- quality assurance arrangements;
- programme planning, development and delivery; and
- student number data.

The results of the analysis are presented in Table 12. The table shows that the APU Regional University Partnership is the largest by some way, both in terms of the number of partners and the volume of higher education activity delivered by colleges in the partnership. The Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education is the

smallest in student number terms and has the same number of partners as HETP. SURF and HETP are similar in terms of student numbers, but SURF has more than twice as many members as HETP. It should be noted that the new and wider partnership between Middlesex University and college partners will have 11 college partners compared to four in HETP.

Analysis 2: Quantitative measures of contribution to widening participation

Respondents said they used two quantitative measures to assess their contribution to widening participation:

- a. Growth in student numbers; and
- b. Growth in the range of higher education provision offered by partner colleges.

Growth in student numbers

It proved difficult to gather comprehensive, comparable and robust data on student numbers. Initial requests to partnerships (via the lead university in each case) asked for data about student numbers in partner colleges, growth in those numbers between 1999-2000 and 2001-02 and an analysis of the contribution to widening participation. The information received from three of the partnerships focused on student numbers, full and part-time, recruited to higher education programmes in the further education colleges in the partnerships. One of the three (SURF) had also analysed the numbers by the age of students. The fourth partnership – the APU Regional University Partnership – had done a full analysis of the data according to postcode, age, gender, ethnicity and disability as a means of measuring for itself the contribution that its activities had made to widening participation. It should be noted that APU had received significant funding from HEFCE's Restructuring and Collaboration Fund to harmonise systems for data collection and transfer between the university and the colleges.

| Table 12: Summary of key aspects of case study partnerships | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| Details | HETP | SURF | APU Regional University Partnership | Bedfordshire Federation for F&HE |
| Lead institution | Middlesex University | Staffordshire University | Anglia Polytechnic University | University of Luton |
| Form of partnership | Funding consortium | Funding consortium | Franchise partnership | Franchise partnership |
| Date of establishment | 1998 | 2000 | 1992 | 1992 |
| Size, by no. of college partners, of which: | 4 | 11 | 23 | 4 |
| a. FE colleges delivering HE | 4 | 10 | 19* | 3 |
| b. Sixth form colleges delivering HE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| c. Sixth form colleges not delivering HE | 0 | 1 | 3 * one college partner is in the HE sector | 0 |
| Size, by no. of FTE HE students taught by college partners in 2001-02 | 1089 | 1245 | 3472 | 320 |
| Partnership agreement | In line with code of practice | In line with code of practice | In line with code of practice | In line with code of practice |
| Stated aims | To provide high-quality, accessible, innovative, relevant and cost-effective lifelong education and training opportunities and, thereby, to contribute significantly to the economic, social and cultural well-being of the communities it serves | To plan and provide quality assured higher education to widen participation and facilitate progression for people in Staffordshire and Shropshire | To widen participation, increase recruitment and retention, enhance the quality of HE in FE, develop effective working relationships with local LSCs, plan resources and develop the Regional University Partnership | To enhance the planning, quality, range and accessibility of further and higher education in Bedfordshire |
| Management and infrastructure | Executive; Management Group; 8 networking groups; HETP office; Director of HETP | Management Board; Management Committee; quality assurance and curriculum development committees; 5 other groups; SURF offices; Director of Widening Participation (SU) | Regional University Academic Council; Regional Principals Strategic Policy Steering Group; 5 regional faculties; Regional Office; Director of Regional Office | Federation; Vice Principals' Group; College HE co-ordinators and University DVC; college office from October 2003; plans to appoint a Director of F&HE (University of Luton) |

| Table 12 (continued) Summary of key aspects of case study partnerships | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| | HETP | SURF | APU Regional University Partnership | Bedfordshire Federation for F&HE |
| Financial arrangements | University topslice (flat rate per FTE student); colleges paid 3 times a year (September, January, May) | University topslice (percentage of HEFCE income for colleges); monthly payment against profile | University topslice (percentage of HEFCE income for colleges) | University topslice (percentage of HEFCE income for colleges); colleges paid termly in arrears |
| Quality assurance arrangements | HETP networking group for Quality Assurance, Enhancement and Standards; University takes lead role for all programmes leading to University awards but not for directly validated Edexcel provision in colleges | SURF Quality Committee; common framework for QA; University takes lead role for all programmes leading to University awards; directly validated Edexcel provision in colleges may be incorporated in common framework | Regional Faculty Boards will have QA remit for programmes delivered by RUP; University takes lead role for all programmes leading to University awards but not for directly validated Edexcel provision in colleges | University takes lead role for all programmes leading to University awards but not for directly validated Edexcel provision in colleges |
| Programme planning, development and delivery | No formal joint planning mechanism; mostly bilateral joint development and delivery; recent example of joint development a model for the future | Curriculum Development Committee has role in joint planning of new programmes, eg foundation degrees | Regional Faculty Board remit for curriculum planning and development; Regional Planning Approvals Sub-Committee | No formal mechanisms for joint planning; bilateral discussions about new programmes in colleges |
| Student number data | University responsible for aggregate student number returns; each member institution responsible for individualised student number returns; difficulties reported in data collection; student numbers available for 1999-2000 to 2001-02 but little analysis of contribution to widening participation | University takes responsibility for all student number returns (but arrangements not in line with code of practice); no difficulties reported in data collection; student numbers available for 1999-2000 to 2001-02 but little analysis of contribution to widening participation | University responsible for all student number returns; student numbers available for 1999-2000 to 2001-02; analysis of contribution to widening participation (by postcode, age, gender, ethnicity and disability) | University responsible for all student number returns; student numbers available for 1999-2000 to 2001-02 but little analysis of contribution to widening participation |

Source: Documents and data from case study partnerships and information from interviews with representatives of case study partnerships 2002-03

A possible interpretation of the variability is that three of the four partnerships do not systematically analyse the contribution to widening participation that is delivered by the college partners. Each of the universities in the partnerships carried out analysis of its own student recruitment in relation to widening participation, but with the exception of the APU Regional University Partnership, this level of analysis was not carried out for the students taught in partner colleges. It may be that the partnerships regard the fact that students are recruited to higher education programmes delivered by partner colleges as sufficient evidence of widening participation. University and college respondents were clear that the kind of students who choose to pursue higher education qualifications in a college are more likely to be non-traditional students. As such, an increase in their numbers will contribute to a widening of participation although not all of them will fall into the 18-30 age group that is the subject of the Government's specific 50% participation target.

The figures obtained from the case studies that can be compared with each other are for full-time equivalent students in partner colleges for each of the years from 1999-2000 to 2001-02. The reason for using the first of those dates is that the two funding consortia were only established in 2000 but figures are available for the volume of higher education delivered by student partners in the year immediately before the establishment of the consortia, ie 1999-2000. At the time of undertaking the research, 2001-02 was the latest year for which the partnerships had data.

Table 13 shows the growth in full-time equivalent student numbers between 1999-2000 and 2001-02 and the percentage represented by the growth. The table shows growth in the numbers of full-time equivalent students taught in partner colleges in each of the partnerships over the period, with a markedly higher rate in the third year of the period.

| Table 13: Partnerships' contribution to widening participation – numbers of full-time equivalent students | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-------------------|----------|--|-------------------|----------|--|-------------------|----------|
| | FTE higher education students in partner colleges | | | FTE higher education students in partner colleges | | | FTE higher education students in partner colleges | | |
| | 1999-2000 | | | 2000-01 | | | 2001-02 | | |
| | Nos (fte) | Growth in FTE nos | % growth | Nos (fte) | Growth in FTE nos | % growth | Nos (fte) | Growth in FTE nos | % growth |
| HETP | 962 | n/a | n/a | 1005 | 43 | 5% | 1089 | 84 | 8% |
| SURF | 1084 | n/a | n/a | 1125 | 41 | 4% | 1245 | 120 | 11% |
| APU Regional University Partnership | 2948 | n/a | n/a | 3023 | 75 | 2.5% | 3472 | 449 | 15% |
| Bedfordshire Federation for F&HE | 170 | n/a | n/a | 190 | 20 | 12% | 320 | 130 | 68% |
| TOTALS | 5164 | - | - | 5343 | 179 | 3.5% | 6126 | 783 | 14.5% |

Source: Data provided by lead universities in case studies

Collectively, the colleges in the four case study partnerships increased student numbers by almost 1,000 full-time equivalent students, or 18%, in the period from 1999-2000 to 2001-02. When measured against the growth of 6% in enrolments in higher education institutions over the same period (HESA Statistical First Release 56), this appears to demonstrate a significantly greater contribution to increasing and possibly widening participation by the further education colleges in the four case study partnerships. Clearly, these measurements are not comparing like with like. Notwithstanding the weaknesses in the quality of the underlying data, the higher level of growth in the colleges in the four case study partnerships would appear to offer a positive indication of the success of partnerships in widening participation, on the basis of this limited analysis. Some of the growth may reflect the changing definition of what was included in the prescribed higher education category from academic year 1999-2000.

Growth in the range of higher education provision offered by partner colleges

This was the second quantitative measure by which partnerships said they judged their contribution to widening participation. Again, it was not possible to collect comparable information about the growth in the range of higher education provision offered by college partners as a result of their partnerships with their respective universities, despite having explicitly requested it from the partnerships on several occasions.

College respondents in all four case studies spoke enthusiastically about the opportunities to develop and extend their higher education provision under their respective partnership arrangements. Four of those interviewed described the new programmes their college had mounted since joining their respective partnerships. For example, all four partnerships had developed foundation degrees, following the introduction of the new qualification in 2000. But hard information about the type and number of new programmes that each partnership had developed since 1999-2000 did not appear to be collected centrally by partnerships as a measure of their development. Alternatively, if it was collected, the researcher was unable to obtain it. Therefore, while individual members of partnerships may have seen the extension of their higher education provision as a contribution to widening participation, the case study partnerships did not use this as a performance indicator. In practice, the only measure that mattered was the growth in student numbers arising from the extension of provision.

In relation to the findings from the analysis of quantitative data, doubts about the completeness of the student number data mean that it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the extent to which the partnerships contributed to widening participation. It was not possible to determine how much of the student numbers increase could be attributed to a re-categorisation of higher education activity in the wake of the shift of responsibility for funding higher national qualifications from FEFC to HEFCE. The analysis of the data indicates a growth trend in the numbers of higher education students in the colleges in the partnerships over the period 1999-2000 to 2001-02. However, without a more detailed analysis of the nature of the students making up these numbers and the programmes they were studying, it is impossible to state conclusively that the increases were the outcome of partnerships' efforts to widen participation.

In addition to the quantitative measurement of their contribution to widening participation, respondents spoke about how they measured their success in other, qualitative ways. The next section looks at qualitative measures as part of a thematic analysis of information collected in the case studies.

Analysis 3: Thematic analysis of qualitative data

The qualitative information collected for the case studies was analysed against the framework described in Chapter 2 (Table 3). The framework comprised three themes – external, structural and operational factors – and 14 sub-issues.

Theme 1: External factors

Under this theme, five issues were identified that might impact upon the operation or effectiveness of partnerships between higher and further education:

- 1a: Different methodologies in higher and further education for funding;
- 1b: Different methodologies in higher and further education for data collection;
- 1c: Different methodologies in higher and further education for quality assurance;
- 1d: Different terms and conditions of service in the two sectors; and
- 1e: Location of partnerships and the administrative boundaries of bodies that bear upon higher and/or further education.

These issues are those over which partnerships have no direct control, although they may develop strategies for dealing with them.

Recent commentators on the interface between higher and further education have noted the divergent policy development (Parry and Thompson 2002) between higher and further education that has created barriers to the development of effective partnerships between the sectors. HEFCE reviews of higher education in further education (HEFCE 2003a and HEFCE 2003b) and of indirect funding arrangements (HEFCE 2003c) reflected the operational difficulties experienced by institutions engaged in partnerships of having to deal with systems of funding, data collection and quality assurance.

Frequent reference was made in interviews to the different terms and conditions of staff in further and higher education. The location of partnerships was mentioned by some

respondents as having an impact on an institution's or partnership's scope for widening participation.

Findings from Theme 1

1a: Different methodologies in higher and further education for funding

The colleges in the case study partnerships receive the majority of their higher education funding indirectly via the respective universities. In only one of the four case studies were there examples of colleges retaining some direct funding from HEFCE. A respondent from one of these colleges spoke positively about the benefits of direct funding compared to indirect funding via the partnership, saying that it gave the college more control over its own destiny. College respondents from two other case studies expressed the view that indirect funding of their higher education provision could lead, in time, to them feeling a reduced sense of ownership or autonomy.

The issue of different funding systems for further and higher education did not arise as an issue with any of the respondents. It appeared to be something that they accepted as a consequence of working in two sectors that have different funding bodies. Three higher education respondents from the two funding consortia, HETP and SURF, were concerned about an occasional lack of clarity on HEFCE's part about the extent to which targeted funds were for the benefit of the whole consortium or just for the university in the consortium. They expressed a lack of confidence in the basis on which allocations of targeted funds had been calculated, saying it was not always clear whether partner colleges' student numbers had been included and whether the data was an accurate reflection of colleges' activity. These uncertainties generated concerns that colleges in the consortia were being disadvantaged in comparison with those colleges in receipt of direct funding or in franchise partnerships. Two respondents in one funding consortium identified a specific example of colleges in consortia arrangements being financially disadvantaged compared with colleges that were funded directly or through franchise partnerships. This issue did not arise with the two franchise partnerships, APU and the Bedfordshire Federation, where, generally speaking, colleges were able to access directly HEFCE targeted funds relating to higher education in further education.

1b: Different methodologies in higher and further education for data collection and transfer

Parry and Thompson (2002) devote an entire appendix to the problems of collating and comparing robust and complete statistical information on higher education participation because of the different methodologies used in the two sectors. They describe the “restricted range and doubtful quality” of some of the data about higher education in further education. The shortcomings are attributed to “the diversity of franchising arrangements, the different interpretations of the guidance on completing [statistical] returns to the relevant bodies and the complexities of the data extraction methods”. Some five years earlier, Parry argued that the separate data collection systems that applied in the two sectors constrained the proper assessment of the contribution made by further education colleges to the massification of higher education (Parry 1997).

The findings from the case studies provide further evidence to support the reservations expressed in research by Parry and Thompson (2002) about the quality and quantity of data on higher education in further education. Three of the four case studies did not appear to collect and analyse comprehensive information about the higher education delivered in partner colleges.

APU had had received HEFCE funding that enabled it to harmonise software between partnership members so that student data could be transmitted between partners. The two higher education co-ordinators interviewed for the APU partnership reported that data collection systems worked well across the partnership, after some initial teething problems in the early days. APU was able easily and promptly to provide information that analysed student numbers to see how far recruitment to partner colleges’ higher education programmes had widened participation. Three of the four college respondents in the Bedfordshire Federation reported a mixed picture. Some found that data collection and transfer arrangements between their college and the University of Luton worked well while others regularly found difficulty in reconciling their higher education student numbers with those held by the University.

The different arrangements for data collection and transfer in the funding consortia were outlined in Chapter 2. The analysis of the case studies found the distinction between the two types of partnership was not as clear cut in practice. HETP institutions were following the HEFCE code of practice and making individualised student returns to HESA (Middlesex University) and LSC (college partners). In the first year of operation as a funding consortium, there was confusion amongst college

members about the arrangements for making individualised student number returns. College respondents acknowledged there had been improvements in the following year.

In SURF, Staffordshire University made individualised student number returns to HESA on behalf of all the members of the consortium. Three college-based respondents indicated that colleges were happy to let the University handle this element of bureaucracy for them and described the arrangements as very smooth. However, they were not in line with HEFCE's code of practice for funding consortia.

1c: Different methodologies in higher and further education for quality assurance

Half of the college-based higher education co-ordinators indicated that they and their colleagues found it time-consuming and challenging to have to master the different underlying principles and approaches of the QAA-led quality assurance system when only a very small proportion of their activity was in the higher education sector. They referred to differential levels of engagement on the part of university link tutors responsible for monitoring quality assurance of colleges' higher education provision.

Under the APU Regional University Partnership arrangements, the regional faculty boards were to have a key role in assuring the quality of the programmes delivered in the name of the University. The regional faculty boards would report to the University's Academic Standards, Quality and Enhancement Committee. For the Bedfordshire Federation, the University of Luton operated a common quality assurance policy for all provision delivered by partner colleges. Course review boards reported to the University's Academic Standards Committee.

As well as having different systems for quality assurance in the two sectors, the HEFCE codes of practice set out differences in the way that quality assurance is dealt with by franchise partnerships and funding consortia. In the former, the university is responsible for the quality of the programmes delivered by partner colleges. The situation is different for funding consortia where "each consortium member is directly responsible for the quality of the learning opportunities of its HE programmes, for the achievement of standards, and for putting right any significant weaknesses" (HEFCE 2000).

Middlesex University and HETP had deliberately adopted a variation to the principles in the code of practice, taking the view that the University ultimately has the responsibility

for the quality of programmes delivered in its name. SURF took a similar view and was establishing a common quality framework across the whole consortium. Both HETP and SURF had a consortium-wide quality committee. The approaches adopted by HETP and SURF meant that the universities in each case were providing more support to partner colleges in respect of quality assurance than was envisaged in the code of practice.

1d: Different terms and conditions of service

Academic staff in further education colleges normally have a greater number of contact hours with students than their counterparts in higher education. This means that they have less time for scholarly activity and research and for meeting their link colleagues in partner universities to discuss curriculum development and quality assurance issues.

College and university respondents referred to the problems that arose from the differences in terms and conditions. University staff in two partnerships referred to the difficulties in getting college staff to attend joint staff development events because of college staff teaching loads. Two college respondents in another partnership spoke about the lack of capacity their staff had for development of the higher education curriculum because their main focus was teaching further education students. They also spoke about time constraints in relation to developing a familiarity with higher education quality processes; they were seen as an additional burden for which no time allowance was given.

The issue had been recognised and was being dealt with in different ways in the four partnerships. HETP and SURF both used funding from HEFCE allocations² to provide college staff with time for development or other activity related to their higher education provision. The Bedfordshire Federation had secured funds from the local LSC to establish higher education co-ordinator posts in each of the partner colleges to facilitate progression to higher education. The APU partnership planned a programme of staff development activities at times when college staff were generally able to attend either in person or by using videoconferencing facilities.

The evidence from the case studies suggests that the differences in terms and conditions posed a problem in a variety of practical ways. The partnerships were using HEFCE or LSC targeted funds to buy development or co-ordination time for colleagues in partner colleges. The strategies helped to address some of the practical difficulties

and reduced their impact on the overall effectiveness of partnerships. However, the sense gained from interviews was that the differences in terms and conditions were a significant contributory factor to the cultural differences that are considered under Theme 2.

1e: Location of partnership

Staff in the case study partnerships shared their perceptions that location has an impact on student recruitment and their efforts to widen participation in higher education. They believed that economic, social and cultural factors to do with their location made a difference to their ability to increase and widen participation, as did the number of local competitors. The locational factors cited by each partnership combined specific geographical issues and wider generic issues, including the provision of higher education in rural areas and patterns of higher education participation among minority ethnic communities. The location and administrative boundaries relating to each partnership are shown in a table in Appendix 8. All four partnerships

HETP served a wide and culturally diverse area in north London and Essex. London has the largest number of higher education institutions of any of the English regions. Students living in the area served by HETP had a wide range of higher education options to choose from. Part of the West Midlands area served by SURF was characterised by low aspirations on the part of students who do not see the value of higher education qualifications. Widening participation in such an area was not a straightforward task. A similar situation obtained in the Bedford area of the Bedfordshire Federation. Many students were content to leave school/college with a Level 3 (FE) qualification (eg A levels or GNVQ Advanced). The APU partnership saw one of its key roles as bringing higher education opportunities to those living in rural or isolated areas. Three of the four partnerships covered areas that had large minority ethnic populations. Colleges in these areas reported that a high proportion of families from minority ethnic backgrounds preferred their children to pursue their higher education locally either at the University or in one of the colleges offering higher education opportunities.

Three of the four partnerships did not match administrative boundaries. This is not normally an issue as administrative boundaries are largely meaningless to students. However, boundaries may be relevant to targeted funding. It may be more difficult for

² HEFCE Rewarding and developing staff fund; HEFCE Teaching and learning development fund

partnerships that straddle regional or other administrative boundaries to access funding that supports all members of a partnership, if the funding has been allocated on a local or regional basis. Such funds as are regionally allocated are not, as yet, substantial enough to constitute a major barrier to the operation of partnerships that cross regional boundaries.

Theme 2: Structural factors

Under Theme 2, five issues were identified as having the potential for making a difference to partnerships and how they worked:

2a: Purpose of the partnership

2b: Form of partnership (ie whether it was a franchise arrangement or funding consortium)

2c: Nature of the infrastructure in support of the partnership

2d: Partnership agreement, including the financial agreement

2e: Cultural differences between higher and further education.

These issues are about the structures and systems that have been created by the partnerships. With the possible exception of 2e, they are within the power of partnerships or their constituent members to shape and change.

Findings from Theme 2

2a: Purpose of the partnership

All the partnerships had articulated their mission, aims or objectives as part of the partnership agreement. These statements represented the explicit reason for the existence of the partnership. The stated aims are captured in Table 12 earlier in this Chapter. In interviews, respondents expressed other, implicit reasons for partnership that went beyond those captured in the partnership agreement documents. The purpose of partnership was frequently expressed in terms of the benefits of partnership, reflecting Abramson's (1996) partnership dividends.

The reasons identified by the college respondents in the case studies included offering students a greater range of progression opportunities and providing a means of validating and funding their higher education. Some valued universities' support in relation to quality assurance and curriculum development. They also valued

opportunities for staff development presented by involvement in higher education activities. Three college respondents said that offering higher education and/or being associated with a university added to the prestige of their institution. The ability to access some of the facilities, particularly library facilities, of the partner university was seen as a benefit by college respondents. Where these facilities had been secured through funding that was only available to institutions working in partnership, the benefits of collaboration were particularly recognised by college and university partners.

For the university respondents in the case studies, the reasons for partnership included building the supply chain of students and enabling them to reach out to a wider range of students, including those in widening participation categories. Partnership with local colleges also enabled them to create a stronger regional presence. Colleges' links with employers and the community were valued by a respondent in one of the case study universities. Two of the universities in the case studies valued the greater experience that colleges had in delivering part-time higher education. Three university respondents commented particularly on the broad range of support mechanisms that colleges were able to provide for learners from diverse backgrounds. Senior staff in at least two of the case study universities saw the partnership potentially offering an opportunity for them to focus on higher level work, research and international recruitment by allowing partner colleges to deliver Level 1 and 2 higher education. However, these plans were not universally popular with staff at faculty or school level who saw them as 'giving away' their areas of work to partner colleges. One university senior manager pointed out that it was also at this level that staff were more likely to query the value or purpose of the partnership, often seeing it in terms of additional work (curriculum development, quality assurance) but without appreciable returns.

University respondents in two of the case studies expressed a view that their higher/further education partnerships were ready to move to a new stage of development. The first was the Vice Chancellor of Staffordshire University who described SURF as a transformational model in which each member is recognised as an equal partner. The other partnership that was trying to create a new and stronger model of collaboration was the APU Regional University Partnership. APU's Pro Vice Chancellor saw the Regional University Partnership as the next stage of development following the maturation over a ten-year period of the University's links with regional colleges in the Regional Network. He saw the creation of Regional Faculties as a means of bringing together colleagues from the University and partner colleges to work jointly on academic planning, development and delivery. In both cases, all college

respondents acknowledged the commitment to partnership demonstrated by senior colleagues in the respective universities.

2b: Form of partnership

HETP and SURF chose to adopt the funding consortium route when the option was introduced by HEFCE in 1999. HETP and SURF respondents spoke of the funding consortium route as offering the potential to build a potentially stronger partnership than the franchise route because it was predicated on the equality of members. College respondents in HETP and SURF perceived the potential for greater stability in relation to student numbers and funding, affording them greater confidence in forward planning of their higher education provision. The operational difficulties in relation to data collection described above were not apparent when the decision to pursue funding consortium status was made. Although the code of practice for funding consortia placed the onus for quality assurance on individual consortium members, both HETP and SURF chose to maintain a greater role in quality assurance for the respective universities than the code suggested.

The APU Regional University Partnership and the Bedfordshire Federation were established well before the funding consortium option became available. The Bedfordshire Federation was described by a college respondent as a loose collection of bilateral franchise arrangements between the colleges and the University of Luton. It operated through a series of regular meetings between staff from member institutions. The APU Regional University Partnership also comprised a series of bilateral franchise arrangements but operated as a partnership through a framework of joint committees and meetings involving APU and partner regional colleges.

Each of the partnerships was undergoing changes during the life of the project. SURF was planning new SURF university centres at each partner college. The APU Regional University Partnership was being implemented following the development of the new model. The Bedfordshire Federation was establishing a wider Bedfordshire Higher Education Alliance involving employers and other stakeholders to provide a sharper focus on the 50% participation target using the *Aimhigher* Partnerships for Progression sub-regional plan as a vehicle. The new consortium to replace HETP was considering whether they wished the new partnership to adopt the funding consortium or franchise partnership model, partly because of their experience of some of the apparent disincentives associated with the funding consortium model.

2c: Partnership infrastructure

Three of the four partnerships had well developed infrastructures, including dedicated administration arrangements. One partnership, the Bedfordshire Federation for Further and Higher Education, had an infrastructure that was less well developed, reflecting its history as a looser and less formalised arrangement.

The management and infrastructure arrangements for each partnership are summarised in Table 12. Both funding consortia had dedicated offices for the day to day management of the partnerships, located in the respective universities. So too did the APU partnership, in the form of APU's Regional Office. In October 2003, the Bedfordshire Federation announced its intention to establish a college office in the University of Luton to administer higher education student enrolments in partner colleges. The APU partnership was the only one of the case studies that had developed an academic delivery structure involving partner colleges.

Based on the perceptions of five college respondents, partnership infrastructure makes a significant difference to effective partnership operation. Committee structures that integrate the work of the partnership into the life of the respective partner institutions created a strong sense of inter-dependency and links that went beyond the terms of reference of individual committees in two of the case studies (SURF and the APU RUP). All case studies demonstrated the involvement of senior people from all member institutions, sending powerful signals about the value placed upon partnership by members.

From the evidence collected in these four case studies, a dedicated partnership office appears to play an important role in making the partnership work, particularly as far as the colleges are concerned. Three of the four case studies had had a partnership office responsible for the day to day operation of the partnerships since the establishment of their respective partnerships. The perceptions of college respondents in these case studies were that the partnership office contributed significantly to the effective operation of the partnership. In the case of the Bedfordshire Federation, some college respondents saw the lack of a dedicated partnership office as a contributory factor in the Federation's relative lack of impact.

2d: Partnership agreements, including financial agreements

Each of the partnerships was governed by a partnership agreement. They were all in line with HEFCE's codes of practice for funding consortia or franchise partnerships, as appropriate, although they varied in terms of the detail included. The partnership agreements for the funding consortia, HETP and SURF, were signed by all members of the consortium. In the franchise partnerships, the APU Regional University Partnership and the Bedfordshire Federation, the agreements were between the university and individual colleges in each case. Respondents agreed that the important issue was that there was clarity in the partnership agreement about respective responsibilities and entitlements.

One issue that varied between partnerships was the exclusivity of the partnership agreement. The two funding consortia adopted essentially the same approach: that if the partner university was unable to provide the support or progression for colleges' higher education provision, it was possible for the colleges, by agreement, to seek links with other higher education institutions. Two SURF college respondents expressed disquiet about the exclusivity of the arrangement, commenting that they needed to maintain strong relationships with all local universities. This reflected a remark by a university respondent in SURF that some of the colleges liked to 'flirt' with other universities but that other SURF colleges generally applied peer pressure to ensure compliance with the partnership agreement. In the APU Regional University Partnership, colleges were required to set out their reasons if they decided to pursue multiple franchise arrangements. The University of Luton did not impose an exclusivity clause in its agreements with colleges in the Bedfordshire Federation.

All case study partnerships shared information with the researcher about the financial element of the partnership agreement, although three of the four requested that the information remain confidential. Three of the four universities deduct a percentage of the HEFCE income for colleges' higher education programmes before passing it on while the fourth deducts a flat rate per full-time equivalent student. The services provided in return for the topslice were spelt out in the respective partnership agreements, or in annexes that were updated annually. College respondents in all four case studies were generally positive about the value for money provided by the arrangements.

2e: Cultural differences

Researchers on the higher/further interface have written about the cultural differences that exist between the sectors (eg Clow 1999). Some of the differences are directly related to the issues described under Theme 1 and relate to the different funding, data and quality regimes in higher and further education and to the different terms and conditions of service for academic staff in the two sectors. Others are to do with the language or terminology of the two sectors that can create barriers in communication between staff on either side of the divide.

A further cultural difference identified by one university respondent was linked to the power relations that are ingrained in structures. In each of the case studies, the university was in the lead as regards: student numbers and therefore funding; student data; planning and validation; quality assurance; and relationships with the main higher education bodies, including HEFCE, HESA and QAA. The status of lead institution may contribute to a sense of hierarchy among the members of partnerships.

College respondents in all four case studies commented on the differential levels of support from faculties or schools in the partner university. These were attributed to not valuing the contribution of college colleagues and having reservations about the resource commitment involved in partnership activities. In two of the partnerships (APU RUP and SURF), senior university staff had taken steps to iron out the variable levels of support for partnership. In HETP and the Bedfordshire Federation, the Deputy Vice Chancellors were recognised as the driving force in their respective universities. They had worked hard to develop and maintain links with partner colleges when the merits of partnership were not immediately obvious to all their colleagues.

Theme 3: Operational factors

Four issues were analysed for Theme 3:

3a: Programme planning, development and delivery

3b: Marketing

3c: Internal competition for students

3d: Access to facilities of the respective universities.

These issues reflect some of the operational manifestations of partnerships.

Findings from Theme 3

3a: Programme planning, development and delivery

Each of the case studies had different arrangements for curriculum planning and development across the partnerships. Two of the partnerships had more formal arrangements and were more active in planning the development of new provision for partner colleges to deliver. Moreover, the joint planning mechanisms appeared to strengthen the sense of commitment to the respective partnerships. The SURF Curriculum Development Committee had a role in identifying areas for the development of foundation degrees, to be delivered jointly by partners where appropriate. The APU Regional University Partnership had a Regional Planning Approvals Sub-Committee. The position was less advanced with HETP and the Bedfordshire Federation. HETP established a foundation degree co-ordination group but decisions about new programmes continued to be largely taken as the result of bilateral discussions between Middlesex University and the college concerned. The Bedfordshire Federation did not seek to plan the provision offered by colleges through its regular meetings but, like HETP, did so largely through bilateral discussions between the University and individual colleges.

In all four case studies, the colleges' higher education provision had largely evolved to offer progression routes from their further education vocational programmes. It also reflected the staff expertise and resources available in colleges to develop or deliver particular specialisms.

College respondents in two of the case studies perceived that planning timescales were slower in higher education than in further education. University committee processes were described as "painfully slow" by a respondent in one partnership and "cumbersome and bureaucratic" in another. The respondents believed that they were used to working more quickly and responsively than their university counterparts and saw it as a key factor in meeting the needs of non-traditional students.

3b: Marketing

Of the four partnerships, the most advanced in terms of joint marketing of provision offered by the partnership were SURF and the APU Regional University Partnership. Joint marketing was seen as a means of extending information about the provision on offer by partners to a much wider range of students than individual marketing publications allowed. HETP produced a joint course guide to all the programmes offered by partner colleges, but it appeared to be more useful in developing awareness of the partnership in member institutions than as an external marketing device. In interviews with college respondents in the Bedfordshire Federation, two people believed that their own marketing activities attracted more students than the collective marketing of programmes offered by Federation members. This may have related to the often very local nature of the recruitment to colleges' higher education programmes.

Within the case studies, there were differing views on the extent to which colleges wished to badge themselves as members of the partnerships or as partners with one university. Some colleges were happy to have signs on their buildings indicating their alignment with the university concerned whereas others preferred to retain their own identity in relation to the higher education they deliver.

3c: Internal competition for students

The issue of internal competition surfaced explicitly in one partnership where there were issues about parallel sub-degree provision being offered in the university as well as in partner colleges. The partnership was undertaking a review to clarify and resolve the position. Respondents from other partnerships referred to tensions between the university and college partners in relation to programmes that were offered by both. In all four case studies, the universities concerned had made a commitment not to run foundation degrees but to leave those to the colleges. This position was being reviewed in at least two of the case studies in the light of the White Paper on higher education. Senior university managers in two of the case studies partnerships spoke of an intention to allow partner colleges to deliver the bulk of higher education provision at levels 1 and 2, thus freeing them to concentrate on higher level work and research. The extremely competitive market for students has not allowed these plans to be implemented as the universities concerned have struggled to recruit their target numbers, in common with other modern universities. The continued pressure on universities, particularly the post-1992 institutions, to meet their funding agreements

may mean that the strength of partnerships will become increasingly tested, as institutions strive to recruit students.

3d: Access to facilities of the university

All four case study partnership agreements provided similar levels of access for staff and students of partner colleges to facilities at the respective universities. Two of the partnerships – SURF and the APU partnership – were successful in securing additional funding that they had used to develop shared virtual learning environments. APU had also used its funding to provide videoconferencing facilities capable of linking up to 20 points simultaneously. College respondents in both partnerships were enthusiastic about the benefits of the enhanced facilities that had been provided as a result of the partnerships' ability to attract funding over and above the mainstream. These partnerships were also energetic in arranging joint staff development activities with and for partner colleges.

The ability of partnerships to access funding over and above what would be available to individual institutions was seen by university and college respondents as an example of added value. The enhancements to resources or joint facilities that were provided as a result of securing additional funding were valued by college and university staff alike.

Summary of findings

The case study approach generated a total of 33 findings of which five were drawn from the quantitative data and 28 were derived from qualitative evidence.

The findings from the analysis of the quantitative data are:

1. It proved impossible to gather comprehensive, comparable and robust data from the four case study partnerships on student numbers on higher education programmes in partner colleges.
2. Only one of the four partnerships appeared to have carried out a full analysis of the data according to postcode, age, gender, ethnicity and disability as a means of measuring for itself the contribution that its activities had made to widening participation.

3. Three of the four partnerships did not appear systematically to analyse the contribution to widening participation that is delivered by college partners.
4. It was not possible to collect comparable information about the growth in the range of higher education provision offered by college partners as a result of their partnerships with their respective universities.
5. Allowing for the weaknesses in the data and taking growth in higher education student numbers in partner further education colleges as a proxy for contributing to widening participation, the analysis of the data collected from the partnerships showed a growth trend that is a positive contribution.

These findings are only partial because of the lack of comprehensive and robust data from the case study partnerships. They can, at best, be described as indicative and, more realistically, as tentative. They do not provide a firm basis for ascribing the increases in higher education student numbers in partner further education colleges to the existence of the partnerships or their strategies for widening participation.

The 28 findings from the thematic analysis are summarised in Table 14 below. The table indicates the status of each finding. Of the 28 findings, 14 may be said to be illustrative, six indicative and eight representative, that is, supported by previous findings.

| Table 14: Findings from thematic analysis of qualitative evidence | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Theme no | Issue | Finding | Status of finding |
| 1a | Different methodologies in higher and further education for funding | 1. The difference in the funding systems between the two sectors was not raised as an issue. | Illustrative: describes the views articulated by respondents in the four cases |
| | | 2. The two funding consortia were concerned about the basis on which allocations of targeted funding were calculated and allocated. | Representative: based on views expressed at meetings of HEFCE-recognised funding consortia |
| | | 3. Some college respondents expressed reservations about the perceived lack of autonomy deriving from indirect funding arrangements. | Representative: echoes findings in HEFCE 2003 review of funding agreements |
| 1b | Different methodologies in higher and further education for data collection and transfer | 4. The arrangements for data collection and transfer were an issue in two of the partnerships. They worked best in the partnership that had received HEFCE funding that enabled systems and software to be harmonised across the partnership. | Indicative: findings in non-HETP case studies confirmed researcher's experience within HETP; supported by Parry and Thompson's (2002) account of problems with data at the HE/FE interface |
| | | 5. The different arrangements in funding consortia whereby each member makes their own individualised student data returns was not being observed in one of the case studies and was a source of complaint in the other. | Indicative: researcher's experience in HETP and the fact that SURF has chosen to operate like a franchise partnership in this respect; supported by Parry and Thompson's (2002) account of problems with data at the HE/FE interface |
| 1c | Different methodologies in higher and further education for quality assurance | 6. The differing quality assurance arrangements in the two sectors impacted on the effectiveness of partnership operations. | Indicative: different QA systems in HE and FE mean that additional time must be spent on familiarisation and application of HE processes for staff normally concerned with satisfying the demands of the OFSTED/ALI common inspection framework |
| | | 7. The distinction between franchise partnerships and funding consortia where the university in a funding consortium plays a lesser role in relation to the quality of the provision delivered by partner colleges did not apply in the case of HETP or SURF. | Illustrative: based on the two funding consortia |
| 1d | Different terms and conditions of service | 8. Differences in terms and conditions posed a problem in a variety of practical ways and were a potentially contributory factor to cultural differences between higher and further education. | Representative: based on discussions in other fora, eg Association of Colleges HE Group |

| Table 14: Findings from thematic analysis of qualitative evidence (contd) | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Theme no | Issue | Finding | Status of finding |
| 1e | Location of partnership | 9. All four partnerships believed that economic, social and cultural factors to do with their location made a difference to their ability to increase and widen participation, as did the number of local competitors. | Illustrative: describes the views of respondents in the four cases |
| 2a | Purpose of partnership | 10. The views expressed by respondents on the actual and potential purpose of the partnership went beyond those captured in the partnership agreement documents. | Representative: reflects Abramson (1996) and 'partnership dividends' |
| | | 11. University respondents in two of the case studies expressed a view that their higher/further education partnerships were ready to move to a new and transformational stage of development. | Illustrative: describes the views articulated by respondents in two cases |
| 2b | Form of partnership | 12. Both the franchise partnership and the funding consortium model offered a basis for effective partnership. | Representative: based on findings reported in HEFCE 2003/57 |
| 2c | Partnership infrastructure | 13. Partnership infrastructure, including committee structures and a dedicated partnership office, played an important role in making the partnership work. | Illustrative: describes the views articulated by respondents in four cases |
| 2d | Partnership agreements including financial agreements | 14. The partnership agreements in the four cases were in line with HEFCE's codes of practice although they varied in terms of the detail provided. | Representative: based on findings reported in HEFCE 2003/57 |
| | | 15. Respondents agreed that the important issue was that there was clarity in the partnership agreement about respective responsibilities and entitlements. | Illustrative: describes the views articulated by respondents in four cases |
| | | 16. There were variations as to the exclusivity of the partnership arrangements. | Illustrative: based on four cases |
| | | 17. Three of the four universities deducted a percentage of the HEFCE income for colleges' higher education programmes before passing it on while the fourth deducted a flat rate per full-time equivalent student. | Representative: based on findings reported in HEFCE 2003/57 |
| | | 18. College respondents were generally positive about the good value provided in exchange for the administrative topslice charged by university partners. | Illustrative: based on four cases |

| Table 14: Findings from thematic analysis of qualitative evidence (contd) | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| Theme no | Issue | Finding | Status of finding |
| 2e | Cultural differences | 19. The different terms and conditions of service in the two sectors contributed to the cultural differences, as did the hierarchical structure of partnerships where the university partner was generally in the lead. | Representative: based on discussions in other fora, eg Association of Colleges HE Group |
| | | 20. The difficulties that can ensue from cultural differences can be offset by strong leadership from senior staff in partner institutions and by taking practical steps to reduce their impact. | Illustrative: describes the views articulated by respondents in four cases |
| 3a | Programme planning, development and delivery | 21. Two of the partnerships had more formal arrangements and were more active in planning the development of new provision for partner colleges to deliver. | Illustrative: describes the findings from four cases |
| | | 22. The joint planning mechanisms appeared to strengthen the sense of commitment to the respective partnerships. | Indicative: involvement in processes more likely to generate positive perceptions of participants |
| | | 23. The colleges' higher education provision had largely evolved to offer progression routes from their further education vocational programmes and reflected the staff expertise and resources available in colleges to develop or deliver particular specialisms. | Indicative: likely to be the case for most colleges delivering higher education as a development of their further education specialisms |
| | | 24. Colleges perceived that university planning processes were slow and cumbersome. | Illustrative: describes the findings in two of the four cases |
| 3b | Marketing | 25. Joint marketing was seen as a means of extending information about the provision on offer by partners to a much wider range of students but colleges believed that their individual marketing activities were more effective in this respect. | Illustrative: describes the findings from four cases |
| 3c | Internal competition for students | 26. Internal competition for students was an explicit issue in one partnership where there were issues about parallel sub-degree provision being offered in the university as well as in partner colleges. | Illustrative of one of the cases but likely to be indicative of concerns in partnerships more widely |

| Table 14: Findings from thematic analysis of qualitative evidence (contd) | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Theme no | Issue | Finding | Status of finding |
| 3d | Access to facilities of the university | 27. The ability of partnerships to access funding over and above what would be available to individual institutions was seen by university and college representatives as an example of added value. | Indicative: additional funding is likely to increase the positive perceptions by participants of the vehicle responsible for securing it |
| | | 28. The enhancements to resources or joint facilities (ie shared virtual learning environments and videoconferencing facilities capable of linking up to 20 points simultaneously) that were provided as a result of securing additional funding were valued by college and university staff alike. | Illustrative: describes the findings in two of the four cases |

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter draws conclusions from the findings in relation to the seven research questions and also to the aims and objectives of the study, as set out in Chapter 2. Additionally, issues or implications for the relevant stakeholders are identified, along with recommendations for further research, where appropriate. The chapter also states the overall contribution of the study to the knowledge and understanding of partnerships between higher and further education. In particular, the impact of the study on the HETP, the context for the researcher's professional work and doctorate, is noted.

What is the contribution of partnerships between higher and further education to Government objectives for widening participation in higher education?

The lack of robust, comparable student number data makes it difficult to assess the contribution that partnerships have made to widening participation. There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate conclusively the value of partnerships. The underlying issue appears to be a weakness in partnerships' arrangements for data collection and analysis which is at least partly related to the different methodologies in the higher and further education sectors for data collection. The arrangements for data collection, analysis and transfer worked best in the partnership that had received HEFCE funding for the harmonisation of systems and software across the partnership.

Based on the quantitative data it was possible to collect from the case study partnerships, there appeared to be a growth trend in the numbers of higher education students in partner colleges. The analysis indicated that there was a collective rate of growth in higher education full-time equivalent student numbers in the colleges in the four partnerships of 18% over the period 1999-2000 to 2001-02. This far exceeded the growth rate of 6% for recruitment to higher education institutions in the same period. But it was impossible to identify how much of the growth was as a result of the partnerships and their efforts to widen participation.

There are other possible explanations for the growth in student numbers. One is the re-categorisation of what counted as higher education following the transfer of responsibility in 1999 for funding higher national courses from FEFC to HEFCE. A second is that the numbers of students aspiring to higher education, particularly those leaving school or further education with level 3 qualifications, may have risen because of factors other than the efforts of institutions and partnerships to attract students. For example, demographic trends may have meant that there were simply more people applying to higher education than there were places in the older or more established universities. Some of those may have turned to the post-1992 institutions and their partners as an alternative. The project did not examine these factors.

Because of the limited size of the sample, the conclusions in this section are provisional.

Further research, based on more robust data and using more sophisticated data analysis, is recommended to provide a clearer picture of the growth delivered by colleges in higher/further education partnerships, including how much of the increase in higher education student numbers can be ascribed to other wider societal factors. This research should be regarded as a priority as evidence is needed to help partnerships, HEFCE and the DfES to make decisions about targeting their efforts and resources where they can achieve the best returns for them. At the same time, developments that take forward the Government's commitment to address the administrative barrier of different methodologies for data collection in the two sectors are a matter of urgency.

How is the contribution to widening participation measured?

Partnerships said they measured two quantitative measures for assessing their contribution to widening participation, growth in student numbers and growth in the range of higher education provision offered by partner colleges. The difficulties in gathering comprehensive and reliable student number data are referred to above. Similarly, hard information about the type and number of new programmes that each partnership had developed since 1999-2000 did not appear to be collected centrally by partnerships as a measure of their development. In practice, the only measure that appeared to matter was the growth in student numbers arising from the extension of provision. But even this was not collected and analysed systematically.

Partnerships between higher and further education offer to their members a number of actual or potential benefits that support the priority to widen participation. The benefits reflect the work of Abramson (1996) who identified ‘frequently cited partnership dividends’ for further and higher education. The benefits of the partnerships expressed by respondents in the four case studies are summarised in Table 15.

| Table 15: Benefits of partnership | |
|--|--|
| For university partners | For college partners |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building the supply chain of students • Enabling them to reach out to different categories of students, including those in widening participation categories • Enabling them to consider refocusing their own academic efforts on higher level work, leaving college partners to deliver sub-degree provision and possibly Year 1 and Year 2 of honours degrees • Strengthening their regional presence • Shaping the development of partnerships between higher and further education to take them to a new and potentially transformational level • Access to additional sources of funding only available to institutions in partnerships or consortia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering a wide range of progression opportunities to their students • Providing a validation and funding route for their higher education provision • Enabling them to develop and expand their higher education capacity • Support for curriculum development and quality assurance • Staff development for academic staff • Access to additional or targeted funding, only available to institutions in partnerships or consortia, to support higher education activities • Access to higher education facilities, including those that have been made possible by virtue of engagement in the partnership • Prestige of delivering higher education |

It is possible that respondents over-stated the perceived benefits of partnership, either because they wished to present their partnerships in the best light or because they believed that this was what the researcher was looking for. As most respondents were equally willing to discuss the disadvantages of partnerships, it is more likely that the

benefits identified were either real or reflected the reason for partnerships' existence. On the basis of Abramson's earlier work, the conclusion that partnerships offer benefits to their members would appear to be authoritative.

Against the benefits need to be balanced the cost implications of partnerships that are demanding and expensive in terms of staff time. Many of the respondents believed that their partnership activities were worthwhile but based on a series of qualitative measures rather than harder evidence. Further research that provided evidence on the respective benefits and costs to institutions of their involvement in collaborative activities would be helpful in helping them decide how and where to focus their efforts. This research would also provide information to the DfES and HEFCE/LSC on the investment on the returns to their investment in widening participation.

The benefits had not been translated into performance indicators that were capable of being measured and monitored. A partnership's performance against the indicators would be a way of demonstrating to members, and other stakeholders, the value of partnership activity. Research that explored appropriate performance indicators for partnerships would provide a basis for the institutions involved in collaboration, and for HEFCE, to measure and monitor their effectiveness. On the basis of the important role that partnerships have been given in the expansion of higher education, more information about how well they are succeeding in meeting their objectives in this respect is urgently needed. Together with the additional research identified under RQ1 above, this should be the major priority for the DfES and HEFCE to focus upon. If the incomplete quantitative evidence that this research was able to provide is typical of the network of partnerships as a whole, there is not a strong foundation for expecting partnerships to deliver the required growth.

To what extent is it possible to identify common themes in partnerships between higher and further education that impact on their effectiveness?

There are a number of common themes or factors that may impact on the effectiveness of partnerships. The framework used to analyse the qualitative information gathered in the case studies was a distillation of themes and issues derived from five sources: the literature review; the HEFCE codes of practice for franchise partnerships and funding consortia; issues raised by HEFCE-recognised funding consortia; the researcher's experience of collaborative ventures and emerging issues from the case studies themselves.

The thematic analysis of the case studies against the framework is presented in Chapter 8 and confirms the validity of the themes as common factors that may impact on the effectiveness of partnerships. The conclusion that there are a number of themes that may impact on partnerships between higher and further education may be described as authoritative based on the number of sources from which the themes were derived and the confirmation provided by the findings from the thematic analysis in Chapter 8.

Some of the findings from the analysis in Chapter 8 were further clustered to generate the further themes of barriers and critical success factors in partnerships between higher and further education. These are addressed below.

On the basis of the four case studies, is it possible to identify significant differences in the effectiveness of a) funding consortia and franchise partnerships and b) looser and more formalised partnerships?

In relation to the first part of the question, the principle of equality of members on which the funding consortium model was predicated creates operational challenges in relation to the arrangements for data collection and quality assurance. The challenges may make funding consortia less straightforward to administer than franchise partnerships, where arrangements for data collection and quality assurance are clearly hierarchical, with the university partner taking the lead. Despite the operational difficulties, the conclusion is that both the funding consortium and the franchise partnership model offer a basis for effective partnership.

HEFCE provided guidance to partnerships and consortia in the form of codes of practice but was not prescriptive about how they should operate, including in relation to their financial arrangements. The funding consortium model was introduced without piloting, leaving consortia to learn from experience and to discover the operational difficulties in the process. A reading of the policy texts from HEFCE makes it clear that there was never an intention to create a single blueprint for partnerships and how they should operate. HEFCE has encouraged partnerships but has not identified clear criteria for evaluating their effectiveness. Partnerships have to a large extent been allowed by HEFCE to develop in their own way, with an absence of prescriptive frameworks or criteria for success, making it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness.

The conclusion is provisional as it is based on only two examples of funding consortia.

In relation to the second part of the question, more formalised partnerships are likely to have an infrastructure that supports the delivery of partnership objectives. Well-developed infrastructures in more formalised partnerships appear to make a significant difference to effective partnership operation. Committee structures that integrate the work of a partnership into the life of the respective partner institutions create a strong sense of inter-dependency between institutions. The involvement and commitment of senior people from all member institutions sends powerful signals about the value placed upon partnership by members.

A dedicated partnership office appears to play an important role in making partnerships work. Three of the four case studies had had a partnership office responsible for the day to day operation of the partnerships since the establishment of their respective partnerships. The perceptions of members of these case studies were that the partnership office contributed significantly to the effective operation of the partnership. This conclusion can only be tentative on the basis of a limited sample of four examples of partnership.

What are the barriers to effective partnership operation?

There are a number of barriers to effective partnership operation. The findings from the analysis of the case studies in Chapter 8 enabled seven barriers to be identified. They are summarised in Table 16.

| Table 16: Barriers to effective partnership operation | | | |
|---|---|------------------------|---|
| No | Barrier | Relates to finding no. | Comment |
| 1 | Perceived loss of autonomy for indirectly funded colleges | 3 (representative) | Sense that colleges in indirect funding arrangements are less in control of their own destiny in relation to their higher education activities than they would be if directly funded by HEFCE |
| 2 | Different systems for data collection in further and higher education | 4 (indicative) | Double administrative burden of the different arrangements in the higher and further education sectors for collecting data and returning it to the relevant bodies (for all institutions that deliver a combination of higher and further education, including those in partnerships) |

| Table 16: Barriers to effective partnership operation (cont) | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------|--|
| No | Barrier | Relates to finding no. | Comment |
| 3 | Different arrangements for collecting and returning student data between franchise partnerships and funding consortia | 5 (indicative) | Unhelpful and confusing differences in the arrangements between funding consortia and franchise partnerships; additional burden for colleges in consortia of having to make separate individualised higher education student returns |
| 4 | Different systems for quality assurance in further and higher education | 6 (indicative) | Burden on colleges of operating within different quality assurance frameworks for higher and further education |
| 5 | Different terms and conditions of service in further and higher education | 8 (representative) | Lack of ability of college staff to get involved in higher education development, research and scholarly activity because of the higher number of contact hours with students; potential impediment to the development of effective working relations between staff in higher and further education; contributory factor in cultural differences between the two sectors |
| 6 | Lack of clarity about the purpose of the partnership and respective responsibilities and entitlements | 15 (illustrative) | Variable levels of support for the partnership at different levels in colleges and universities where staff are not clear or convinced about the purpose or value of the partnership |
| 7 | Speed of planning and validation processes | 24 (illustrative) | Perceived slow and bureaucratic planning and validation processes in universities that may block swift responses to meet the changing needs of students, including those in widening participation categories |

Four of the barriers – those relating to the different systems in the two sectors for data collection, quality assurance and the terms and conditions of academic staff – are largely outside of partnerships’ control. Their existence may provide an explanation for partnerships not achieving as much as they had originally planned.

The 2003 White Paper on the future of higher education referred to legislative and administrative barriers to partnership, specifically systems for funding, quality assurance and data. This suggests that the barriers have been identified through other sources. The articulation of the barriers by participants in this research lends further weight to their existence. The combination of these factors points to this being an authoritative conclusion.

As regards the loss of autonomy for indirectly funded colleges, it may be that the option for colleges to receive direct funding from HEFCE is not a realistic prospect. Colleges may need to come to terms with indirect funding and work with their funding partner to create a more satisfactory collaboration. Lack of clarity about the purpose of a partnership is within the powers of partnerships to address. The speed of university planning and validation processes may, in some cases, stem from a lack of understanding on the part of colleges as to what is required. Alternatively, there may be scope to streamline systems. Again, this is an issue that partnerships can address together.

It would be useful to explore in further research which barriers have a real impact on partnerships' ability to achieve their objectives, which are beyond their control and which could be overcome by revising their approaches. The evidence from the research would give clear indications to partnerships, and to those in the DfES, HEFCE and LSC who are working to remove barriers, what the priorities for action should be.

What are the practices adopted by partnerships that appear to be most effective in widening participation?

Partnerships demonstrate a range of good practice in their strategies to widen participation that could usefully be shared more widely. The findings from the analysis of the case studies included examples of good practice in strategies to widen participation. Eight examples are presented, all of which relate directly to the findings in Table 14. The examples were selected because the researcher saw them as potentially having applicability for other partnerships. They differ between practice that appears to have an immediate practical value to students and/or staff in the partnership (Boxes 2, 4 and 8) to those that are about reinforcing partnership structures in ways that might ultimately have a positive impact on partnerships' achievements (Boxes 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7). Research to explore further the potential value of the selected examples of

good practice in strategies to widen participation would be helpful to partnerships considering how to develop their own strategies.

Examples of good practice in strategies to widen participation

Box 1: Good practice in joint planning

Two of the partnerships had developed sophisticated joint planning arrangements. The joint planning mechanisms enabled partners to take a collective view of the needs of the different areas covered by the partnerships. Decisions about new curriculum products, particularly foundation degrees, that would be attractive to non-traditional students, were taken jointly. As well as providing a forum for making decisions about meeting student demand, the joint planning mechanisms appeared to strengthen the sense of commitment to the respective partnerships.

Box 2: Good practice in using new modes and media for learning

Two partnerships had developed virtual learning environments (VLEs) that were accessible to all institutions in the partnership. The VLEs offered more flexible modes of learning as well as additional learning support to students, including those in widening participation categories. One of the partnerships had installed extensive videoconferencing facilities that enabled up to 20 points to be connected simultaneously. The partnership was planning to exploit the technology to enable groups of students in different locations to be linked for joint teaching and learning activities.

Box 3: Good practice in managing the partnership at operational level

Three of the four partnerships had well-established dedicated partnership offices that were a crucial part of making the partnership work at operational level. The best examples were one-stop shops for all matters relating to the interface between further and higher education partners and the operation of the partnership. The partnership office helped to bridge the differences between colleges and university.

Box 4: Good practice in improving data collection in the partnership

One partnership used a funding allocation from HEFCE's Restructuring and Collaboration Fund to harmonise software between partnership members so that student data could be transmitted swiftly and easily between partners. Data collection systems worked well across the partnership, enabling it to measure the outcomes of its activities and to target future development accordingly.

Box 5: Good practice in using funds to release college staff for involvement in HE activities

Three of the partnerships had used earmarked funds to release college staff from teaching so that they could become involved in higher education development activities. The experience of college staff in widening participation in further education was recognised and their involvement in developing curricula designed to attract a broader range of students into higher education was regarded as essential.

Box 6: Good practice in shared staff development activities

Two partnerships were particularly active in putting on a programme of shared staff development activities to enable college staff to develop their skills in relation to higher education development, delivery and related scholarly activity, for the ultimate benefit of the colleges' higher education students.

Box 7: Good practice in marketing colleges' higher education to a wide range of potential students

All four partnerships had developed marketing materials for the provision offered by colleges in the partnership. Two partnerships had committed significant resources to extending information about the courses offered by partner colleges to a much wider range of students than marketing publications from individual institutions would have allowed. Some, but not all, of the colleges in three out of the four partnerships used prominent external and internal signage that signalled their alliance with the university in the partnership. This was particularly valuable in highlighting to potential students in rural or isolated areas that opportunities to study higher education were available locally.

Box 8: Good practice in securing additional funds for the benefit of learners

Two of the partnerships were particularly successful in securing additional funds that they used to make available enhanced resources and facilities for students and staff across the partnership. Their focus on accessing funding that they applied for the benefit of all members of the partnership was seen as a tangible example of added value across the partnership. The enhanced facilities meant that a wider range of learning resources was available to students.

HEFCE published two good practice reports in 2003 following a national project to support the development of higher education in further education. The reports included information about good practice in colleges' partnerships with higher education. The identification of good practice in this research provides further conclusive evidence of good practice in higher/further education partnership activity.

Further research that explored regular, accessible and cost effective ways of sharing information about good practice in widening participation would be helpful to partnerships in developing their strategies. There have been attempts by partnerships to come together in a voluntaristic way to share information and experience. The perception of the researcher is that these have been patchy. This may indicate either that partnerships themselves have not found the activity to be sufficiently valuable to devote time to it or that the task of doing so represents an opportunity cost and one that partnerships are not prepared to prioritise. The benefits of sharing good practice should lead to partnerships adopting enhanced strategies for widening participation that would result in a greater contribution to the Government's objective.

Are there critical success factors in effective partnerships?

There appear to be a number of critical success factors in effective partnerships. The findings from the analysis of the case studies included six factors that appeared to be critically important to the success of partnerships between higher and further education. The critical success factors are, to a large extent, the obverse of the barriers identified above. Table 17 lists the critical success factors and indicates their relationship to the findings.

Even though the sample of four case studies is a limited one, the critical success factors in Table 17 represent one of the key outcomes of the research and are a contribution to the knowledge about what makes partnerships work better. Further research that explored more widely the critical success factors in partnerships and sought to evaluate them would be valuable to those engaged in partnerships, or contemplating becoming involved, in order to widen participation effectively.

| Table 17: Critical success factors in partnerships | | |
|--|---|---|
| No | Factor | Relates to finding no |
| 1 | Clarity of purpose of the partnership | 10, 14, 15 |
| 2 | Consistent drive at a strategic level in member institutions, especially the partner university, to turn the rhetoric of partnership into operational reality | 11, 20 |
| 3 | The integration of the arrangements for partnership oversight, management or co-ordination into the structures of the partner institutions | 13, 21, 22 |
| 4 | A dedicated partnership office to drive the partnership forward and implement effective systems, including those for recording and transferring student number data | 4, 5, 13 |
| 5 | Mechanisms for identifying and tackling potential conflicts within partnerships, eg internal competition for students | 26 |
| 6 | <p>Evidence of demonstrable or measurable value added for all members that includes agreeing performance indicators, collecting data and assessing the extent of achievement in a number of key areas, eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - growth in student numbers (all members) - increase in students who contribute to widening participation numbers (universities) - growth in higher education portfolios (colleges) - ability to access funding that would not be available to institutions operating independently - access to a wider range and better quality of facilities | 10, 27, 28 Findings from analysis of quantitative data |

Contribution of the study

Among the aims and objectives of the research were to:

- add to the knowledge about partnerships between higher and further education for the benefit of other institutions or organisations with an interest in these matters
- locate partnerships between higher and further education in the context of recent and current Government objectives for education, particularly higher education

- inform policy development and implementation in the area of partnerships between higher and further education.

The contribution of this study has been to add to the knowledge about a hitherto under-researched area of activity at the further/higher education interface. Previous research into this area has reflected on the importance of partnerships between higher and further education (Scott and Bocock 1995; Bird 1996; Rawlinson, Frost and Walsh 1996; Clow 1999; Stuart 2002; and Parry and Thompson 2002). This research has elaborated four cases of partnerships between higher and further education that give a better understanding of the shape and direction of partnership activity.

The main focus of the research was the four comparative case studies that generated a significant volume of qualitative evidence. This focus meant that it was not possible to focus as much on the quantitative aspects of the research. It would have been valuable to spend more time in gathering more comprehensive and robust comparable quantitative data in order to provide a reliable quantitative measure of the contribution of higher/further education partnerships.

However, the cases do provide illustrations or indications that serve to illuminate partnerships and their behaviour. The literature review provided a contextual background for the research. It gave a historical, political and social context for the development of partnerships between higher and further education. The qualitative evidence collected in the research provides a valuable description and insight into the way in which partnerships work. The researcher brought her professional knowledge and experience to bear in making connections between the material found in the literature review and the comparative case studies. Throughout the study, she engaged with her extensive network of stakeholders in the higher and further education sectors, including officials at the DfES, HEFCE and LSC. She adopted the role of reflective practitioner during the various stages of the research, including the design, fieldwork and analysis of the findings.³

The outcomes of the research provide a basis for further research that should seek to look at a broader range of higher/further education partnerships and generate a firmer quantitative evidence base. The research has provided further information that the various interested parties, including DfES, HEFCE and HE/FE institutions and

³ Appendix 9 details how the project enabled the researcher to satisfy the level 5 indicators in the Middlesex University academic framework.

partnerships, can reflect on in their quest to improve the effectiveness of current arrangements.

Impact of the study

One of the aims of the study was to enable the HETP to become a more effective organisation and achieve its mission by learning from the good practice demonstrated by three comparator partnerships. The study objectives set out the key approaches for generating the evidence that would enable this aim to be achieved.

The project had a demonstrable impact on HETP and Middlesex University at a much earlier stage than was originally envisaged. The case study of HETP described the way in which the emerging findings from early fieldwork in this research acted as a trigger for a fundamental review of HETP. The decision was taken to dissolve the HETP and establish a new and wider partnership between higher and further education to meet the challenges of the fast-moving policy environment. The new body will still be in its formative stages when the project reaches completion. This report will provide members with more information about the issues and factors that impact on partnerships so that these can be taken into account in developing and implementing the new body.

Further impacts

Close contacts have been maintained with colleagues in the Consortium and with the chair of the major franchisers' group. Members of those groups have expressed an interest in receiving a copy of the project report. The researcher will produce articles on the outcomes of the research and aim to disseminate them at appropriate events, including, for example, meetings of the consortium of HEFCE-recognised funding consortia and the major franchisers' group.

APPENDIX 1

| The framework for higher education qualifications | | |
|---|---------------------------|--|
| Level of qualification | Description | Qualifications |
| 1 | C level (Certificate) | Certificates of Higher Education |
| 2 | I level (Intermediate) | Foundation degrees, ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas |
| 3 | H level (Honours) | Bachelors degrees with Honours, Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas |
| 4 | M level (Masters) | Masters degrees, Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas |
| 5 | D level (Doctoral) | Doctorates |

Source: Quality Assurance Agency

| The National Qualifications Framework | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Level of qualification | Description | Qualifications | | |
| | | General | Vocationally-related | Occupational |
| 0 | Entry level | Certificate of (educational) achievement | | |
| 1 | Foundation level | GCSE grade D-G | Foundation GNVQ | Level 1 NVQ |
| 2 | Intermediate level | GCSE grade A*-C | Intermediate GNVQ | Level 2 NVQ |
| 3 | Advanced level | A Level | Vocational A Level (Advanced GNVQ) | Level 3 NVQ |
| 4 | | Higher level qualifications | | Level 4 NVQ |
| 5 | | Higher level qualifications | | Level 5 NVQ |

Source: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

APPENDIX 2

| Legislative and administrative frameworks for higher and further education | | |
|--|---|--|
| Function | Higher education | Further education |
| Curriculum | Universities have responsibility for validating programmes and awarding qualifications; higher national certificate and diplomas may be validated directly by Edexcel or by universities under licence from Edexcel; some of the higher education delivered in colleges is non-prescribed and funded by LSC | Colleges generally develop their programmes within frameworks specified by the examination and validation bodies responsible for qualifications in the FE sector, eg Edexcel, OCR, City and Guilds. The national Qualifications and Curriculum Authority decides whether a qualification may be entered into the National Qualifications Framework |
| Funding | HEFCE; TTA for recognised teacher training courses; NHS for some programmes allied to medicine; LSC for FE level programmes; other sources, eg European funding | LSC has a funding and planning remit for providers in the learning and skills sector; HEFCE (either directly or indirectly via a franchise partnership or funding consortium) for HE programmes; other sources, eg European funding |
| Quality assurance | Quality Assurance Agency | OFSTED/Adult Learning Inspectorate for FE provision; QAA for HE provision |
| Data collection and analysis | HEFCE (aggregate student data); HESA (individualised student data); LSC (for FE provision) | LSC (individualised student data, including HE students for those colleges in HEFCE-recognised funding consortia); HEFCE; HESA |

Source: Anderson 2003

Note to table: See glossary for explanation of abbreviations and acronyms

APPENDIX 3

| Principles of effective franchise partnerships and funding consortia | | |
|--|---|--|
| Principle no. | Franchise partnerships | Funding consortia |
| 1 | Indirectly funded franchise partnerships should have an explicit and agreed purpose. They should be a means of securing one or more objectives for both the HEI (higher education institution) and the FEC (further education college), for example on widening access or regional collaboration. | Consortia should have an explicit and agreed purpose. They should be a means of securing one or more objectives for both the FECs and the HEI, for example, on widening access, promoting progression or regional collaboration. |
| 2 | HEIs and FECs should agree between them, and publish, a written statement of expectations and obligations of both sides. | All members of the consortium should agree between them, and publish, a written statement of expectations, responsibilities and obligations of members individually and collectively. |
| 3 | <p>The arrangements described in the agreement should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• be transparent• provide stability for students and institutions• specify the arrangements for managing the franchising agreement• specify the respective responsibilities of the HEI and the FEC• specify the financial basis of the agreement• specify the procedures for the HEI to remove student numbers from the FEC for redeployment elsewhere. | <p>The arrangements described in the agreement should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• be transparent• provide stability for students and institutions• specify the arrangements for managing the consortium agreement• specify the respective responsibilities of the lead institution and the other members• specify the financial basis of the agreement• specify the student numbers that each member initially contributes to the agreement• specify the action to be taken if the HEFCE funding contract or the overall controls on student numbers is breached. |
| 4 | <p>The agreement should state how the HEI and the FEC will work together, and in particular state the arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• for students at the FEC to have access to resources and facilities of the HEI• for students at the FEC to progress on to higher level provision directly provided by the HEI• for staff of the FEC and the HEI to work together. | <p>The agreement should state how the members of the consortium will work together, and in particular state any arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• for students to progress on to higher level provision• for staff to work together• for students to have access to resources and facilities of the consortium members. |
| 5 | The HEI should support the FEC in setting and maintaining expectations on quality and standards. | <i>[responsibility for assuring quality rests with the individual institution providing the programme]</i> |
| 6 | The partnership agreement should provide for the agreement, and its effectiveness, to be periodically reviewed. | The consortium contract should provide for the contract, and its effectiveness, to be periodically reviewed. |
| 7 | Where an HEI or an FEC enters into more than one indirect funding relationship, they should state their objectives and how they will ensure coherence in that pattern of relationships. | For funding purposes, an institution should enter into only one consortium agreement. |

Source: HEFCE 00/54, *Higher education in further education colleges, Indirectly funded partnerships: codes of practice for franchise and consortia arrangements*

APPENDIX 4

| Responsibilities of institutions in franchise partnerships and funding consortia | | |
|--|---|--|
| Issue | Franchise partnerships | Funding consortia |
| Distribution of current funding from HEFCE | The lead institution (franchiser) receives all payments. All recurrent funding is calculated using the total funding and students places involved in the franchise. | The lead institution receives all payments. All recurrent funding is calculated using the lead institution's funding and student numbers combined with those contributed to the consortium by the member institutions. |
| Data returns (1): Aggregate student data to HEFCE | All numbers involved in the franchise should be returned by the lead institution, together with those taught at the lead institution | All numbers involved in the consortium should be returned via the lead institution, together with its own numbers. |
| Data returns (2): Individualised student data to HESA | Where an HEI leads a franchise, it should return all the data relating to the franchised places. Individual institutions that are franchisees should not report this provision in any returns that they may make. | HEIs who are members of a consortium should each return their own data. HEIs leading a consortium should not include data from the member institutions. |
| Data returns (3): Individualised student data to LSC | Individual FECs that are franchisees should not report this provision in any returns that they may make. | FECs who are members of a consortium should return their own data. FECs leading a consortium should not include data from the member institutions. |
| Quality assurance | The franchiser is directly responsible for the quality of the learning opportunities and the achievement of standards of the HE programmes it franchises out to another institution. It is also responsible for putting right any significant weaknesses. | Subject to the terms of any validation agreement, each consortium member is directly responsible for the quality of the learning opportunities of its HE programmes, for the achievement of standards, and for putting right any significant weaknesses. |

Source: HEFCE 00/54, *Higher education in further education colleges, Indirectly funded partnerships: codes of practice for franchise and consortia arrangements*

APPENDIX 5

| Documents and data requested from case studies | |
|---|--|
| Documents/data requested | Documents/data received/comment |
| Partnership agreement | Partnership agreement received from all case studies |
| Financial agreement or details of financial contract | Financial details received; confidentiality requested in three out of four cases |
| Details of HE in FE programmes delivered by college partners in 2002-03 and previously, where available | Details received from all case studies |
| Student numbers on HE in FE programmes in the period 1999-2000 to 2001-02 | Data received from all case studies |
| Any analysis undertaken by the partnership of participation patterns for the period 2000-01 to 2002-03 | Comprehensive analysis received from one of the partnerships but none from the other three |

Source: Documents and data received from case study partnerships

List of questions used in semi-structured interviews

1. What were the drivers that led to the creation of the partnership/collaborative arrangement? And/or what was the partnership's/collaborative arrangement's original purpose?
2. How does the partnership/collaborative arrangement relate to the government's policy objectives for higher education? Or is it equally concerned with widening participation to learners aged 30+?
3. What are the aims and objectives of the partnership/collaborative arrangement?
4. To what extent can the aims and objectives be quantified and/or how will colleagues involved know when they have been achieved?
5. To what extent have aims and objectives changed over time?
6. What specific strategies has the partnership/collaborative arrangement adopted to widen and increase participation in the areas it serves?
7. Is the partnership/collaborative arrangement contributing to government targets, ie to what extent is participation in higher education being widened and increased?
8. What data are available to demonstrate evidence of the success of the strategies adopted or progress towards objectives?
9. What relationships does the partnership/collaborative arrangement have with other key stakeholders, for example, schools, local authorities, voluntary and community bodies, in their efforts to widen participation? Are there further education sector colleges in the area that are not members of the partnership/collaborative arrangement?
10. What are the barriers or constraints to achieving the aims and objectives of the partnership/collaborative arrangement?
11. What further steps will be required to achieve the aims and objectives?
12. What expectations does each partner have of the partnership/collaborative arrangement?
13. What benefits does each partner perceive they derive from the partnership/collaborative arrangement?
14. What costs does each partner perceive they pay to belong to the partnership/collaborative arrangement?
15. How do individual partners or the partnership/collaborative relationship collectively assess the effectiveness of the relationship between partners?

Source: Anderson 2003

Template for writing up case studies

Membership and form of partnership

Background and history of the partnership

Purpose of the partnership

How the partnership operates

Direction and management of the partnership

Partnership infrastructure

Partnership agreement

Financial agreement

Data collection

Quality assurance

Programme planning, development and delivery

Access to facilities of the University

Marketing of colleges' higher education provision

The partnership's contribution to widening participation

Range of provision

Student numbers

Perceptions of benefits of the partnership

Relationships between partners

Future development of the partnership

| Location and administrative boundaries relating to case study partnerships | | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| | HETP | SURF | APU Regional University Partnership | Bedfordshire Federation for F&HE |
| Location | North London and Essex | Staffordshire and Shropshire | Eastern region of England, Greater London and Lincolnshire | Bedfordshire and Luton |
| HEFCE region/s | London, Eastern | West Midlands | Eastern, London, East Midlands | Eastern |
| Local LSC areas | London North, Essex | Staffordshire, Shropshire | Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, London East, Lincolnshire | Bedfordshire and Luton |
| LEA areas | Barnet, Haringey, Waltham Forest, Essex | Staffordshire, Shropshire | Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Having, Lincolnshire | Bedfordshire, Luton |
| RDA region/s | As for HEFCE above | As for HEFCE above | As for HEFCE above | As for HEFCE above |

Source: Information from case study partnerships

Satisfying the level 5 indicators in the Middlesex University academic framework

This document considers the project against the indicators at Level 5 (doctoral level study) in the Middlesex University academic framework and makes the case that the indicators have been satisfied. The indicators are considered one by one.

Knowledge

The project is located in a consideration of Government policy for higher education. The policy strand to which the project relates is the objective to increase and widen participation in higher education by people who might not otherwise participate. Partnerships between higher and further education are seen as playing a key role in achieving the objective. Such partnerships are relatively new. Relevant policy documents of the current government and HEFCE since 1997 were considered, together with significant research and commentary on the policy developments. The project is therefore taking forward the understanding of the role that partnerships between higher and further education can play.

Analysis

At the heart of the project are the case studies of different models of partnership. These were analysed to provide information as to what constitutes barriers to effective partnership, good practice in strategies to widen participation and critical success factors in effective partnership operation.

Synthesis

The analysis referred to above is an original contribution to the current knowledge and understanding of partnerships and their contribution to widening participation. The findings from the case studies were synthesised to derive recommendations, primarily for HETP and Middlesex University, but in the knowledge that they might have resonance for other partnerships including those that were the subject of the case studies. As reported in chapters 4 and 9, an interim report was produced in December 2002 on the progress of the project. The findings were considered by Middlesex University and the HETP Executive in January 2003. The interim findings had an immediate impact and resulted in major changes to HETP.

Evaluation

Each case study yielded evidence of different approaches to widening and increasing participation. Evaluation of partnerships' effectiveness was through an examination of the quantifiable outcomes and the qualitative responses from representatives of the partnerships.

Self appraisal/reflection on practice

The starting point for the project was the case study of HETP, the researcher's work base. Through the case studies of three other partnerships between higher and further education in this country, it was possible to review HETP and the researcher's role in it, looking to adopt good practice found in other partnerships.

Planning and management of learning

At the outset of the project, a timetable for its completion was mapped out. At the same time, most of the resources required to complete the project were identified. As the project progressed, the information or resources needed for project completion were kept under review. Activities in the early part of the project were structured to enable an interim report to be produced at the end of 2002 to feed into discussions about the future of HETP. The discussions had been stimulated by early findings from interviews with colleagues in HETP institutions. The project is a timely one. It was undertaken at a time when HEFCE was also reviewing indirect funding arrangements between higher and further education institutions and the White Paper on higher education made it clear that the further widening of participation would be largely achieved through partnerships between higher and further education.

Problem solving

The expectation at the beginning of the project was that it would provide evidence that partnerships were experiencing a range of challenges in meeting their objectives. This proved to be the case. The analysis of the challenges led to a number of recommendations in the final chapter that are designed to overcome some of the problems faced by further/higher education partnerships. In relation to the completion of the project itself, a number of problems were encountered in obtaining comparable

student number data from the case study partnerships. It was necessary to re-specify data requirements to the partnership heads at a relatively late stage of the project.

Communication/presentation

In conducting the case studies, it was necessary to communicate with colleagues in HETP and other partnerships, including some at senior level. Clarity was essential about the purpose of the project and the use that would be made of the information collected from colleagues in the four partnerships that formed the case studies. Staff who were interviewed for the project were offered a copy of the relevant case study, the full final report or the executive summary, as they preferred. It is still intended to publish articles about the outcomes of the project and to make presentations at conferences or seminars of colleagues with an interest in the widening participation agenda.

Research capability

As indicated above, a range of methods was considered and a decision taken to use two main research methods, a review of the literature and a case study approach. Within the case studies, quantitative and qualitative data were collected via a review of documentation and data and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The quantitative information provided a partial response to one of the research questions. The qualitative information was analysed thematically and synthesised to answer other research questions and to come up with conclusions and recommendations. The case studies and this report were written as a means of communicating the outcomes of the project.

Context

The concept of using more structured partnership arrangements between higher and further education as a means of achieving a Government objective for higher education is a relatively new one. The project offered a framework for examining HETP and three other partnerships to derive a broader understanding of the role they play in increasing and widening participation.

Responsibility

The majority of the research for the project was conducted when the researcher was Director of HETP, with high levels of professional autonomy and responsibility, reporting to the HETP Executive and with the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Middlesex University as line manager. The draft interim report on the project was discussed with the Deputy Vice Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor of Middlesex University and triggered a fundamental review of HETP.

Ethical understanding

At the beginning of the project, a number of issues that appeared to have an impact on the successful operation of HETP had been identified. It was expected that other partnerships would have similar issues. In writing the case studies, there was a need to ensure that information was not published that was confidential to the partnerships or that might compromise individual colleagues working within the partnerships. When staff in partnerships agreed to be interviewed, it was made clear to them that one of the objectives of the project was to come up with recommendations for HETP and other partnerships to consider, derived from the evidence of the case studies. A draft transcript of the notes of interviews was shared with interviewees for their comments. A draft of the case studies was sent to the lead institution for their comments and clearance.

GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

| Term or abbreviation | Explanation/comments |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Access/wider access/fair access | The term <i>access</i> is used with both a capital and a small 'a'. Capital 'a' Access connotes a type of course offered by further education colleges that is designed to prepare people who have little in the way of formal academic qualifications for higher education. Small 'a' access is a more general term used to describe the opening up of educational opportunities to people. The emphasis is on the place of learning making its programmes more accessible rather than the individual choosing to participate in learning. <i>Wider access</i> is used to strengthen the point that opportunities are being opened up to a wider range of people who may previously not have found them easy to take part in. |
| ALI | Adult Learning Inspectorate: one of the bodies responsible for inspecting the quality of provision in the learning and skills sector alongside OFSTED |
| City and Guilds | Examination and validation body offering qualifications at further education and higher professional levels |
| Economic competitiveness | Much of the Government rhetoric about the benefits of widening participation in higher education is couched in terms of the benefits to the nation and its economic competitiveness of having a more highly skilled workforce. The demand for graduate labour is a key element of the derivation of the 50% participation target. |
| Edexcel | Examination and validation body offering qualifications at further and higher education levels, including higher national certificates and diplomas |
| Fair access | This term has come into usage relatively recently and is a principle embodied in the 2003 White Paper on the future of higher education. It describes the opening up of opportunities to wider range of people, including those from deprived backgrounds, to enrol at the most "prestigious" universities, to borrow a term employed in the White Paper. |
| FE | Further education |
| FEC | Further education college |
| FEFC | Further Education Funding Council |
| FHE; F/HE | Further and higher education |
| FTE | Full-time equivalent |
| HE | Higher education |

| Term or abbreviation | Explanation/comments |
|----------------------------------|---|
| HEFCE | Higher Education Funding Council for England |
| HEI | Higher education institution |
| HESA | Higher Education Statistics Agency |
| HMI | Her Majesty's Inspector/s |
| LSC | Learning and Skills Council |
| NHS | National Health Service |
| NVQ | National Vocational Qualification |
| OCR | Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts: examination body |
| OFSTED | Office for Standards in Education; responsible for inspecting the quality of provision in the learning and skills sector, alongside ALI |
| QAA | Quality Assurance Agency: responsible for audits and reviews of quality of higher education provision |
| QCA | Qualifications and Curriculum Authority |
| RDA | Regional Development Agency |
| Social inclusion/social cohesion | The present Government has expressed a view, reflected in the 2003 White Paper, that engagement in education and the acquisition of higher level skills and knowledge are powerful tools in building a more inclusive or cohesive society. The concept is rooted in the social justice argument for making higher education more widely available. Widening participation is thus often seen as a means to achieving an end rather than an end in itself. |
| TTA | Teacher Training Agency |

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